BARRY DARE
and the
MYSTERIOUS BOX

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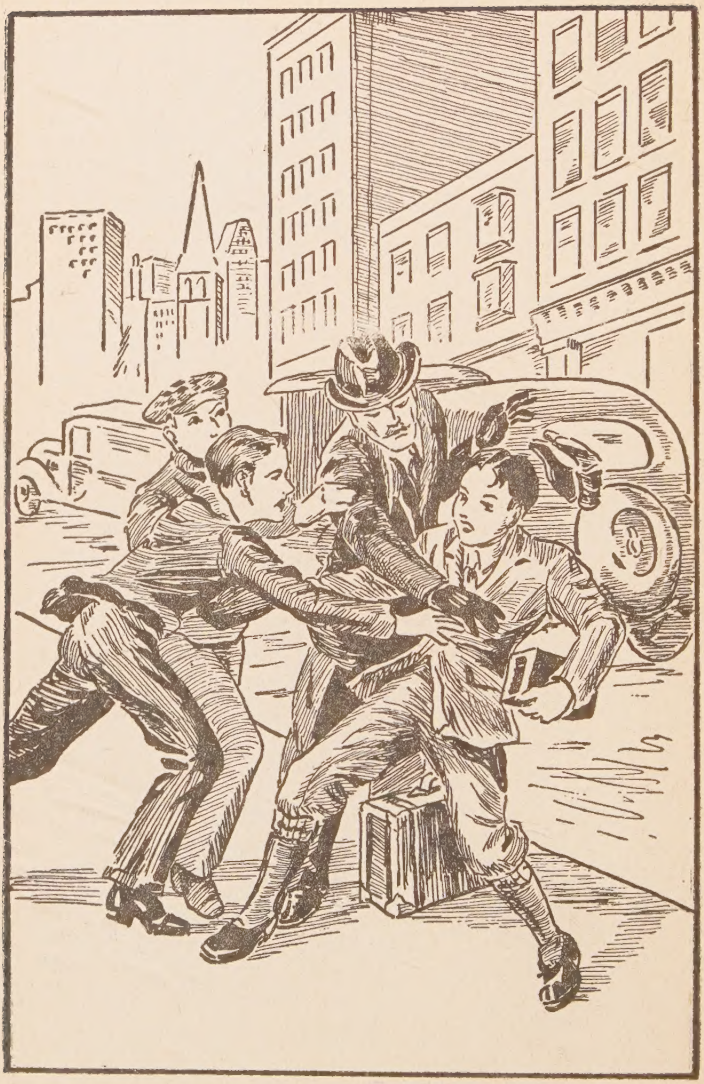

"There it is under his arm now!" shouted Gansy Vleet, and rushed upon Barry.

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BARRY DARE
and the Mysterious Box

By GARDNER HUNTING

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Barry Dare and the Mysterious Box

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BARRY DARE

CHAPTER I

THE DOOR THAT SHUT ITSELF

It was pitch dark in the passage, and Barry had used his last match. He stood still, with a chill beginning to creep over his shoulders.

He could feel the walls of the narrow place by reaching out a hand on either side. The dusty bricks, with little gritty bits of plaster that broke off and rolled under his feeling fingers, seemed to shut him in as if he were in a box. They shut out all sounds, too. Close, still—unbelievably still it was—like a windowless cellar. Still—and sinister!

Barry held with utmost care the package he carried. He had no idea what it really contained; but he had an impression that it might be breakable. And the surprise of finding himself in such a place

as this made him half afraid something would happen to his trust, even before he began to be scared on his own account.

"Handle with care, now; it's valuable!" the man with the red eye-brows had said.

Barry remembered the red eye-brows better than anything else about the strange man, who had come up to him suddenly in the street and had thrust this strange errand upon him. A gray felt hat, with a snap brim, was pulled low over those red brows. Oddly enough, the man's eyes themselves had seemed so deeply shadowed that their color was uncertain; while those heavy, ragged, somehow ugly brows—they showed red!

"Here, kid! Want to make a dollar—what? Well, take this over and deliver it to the man who lives at Number 274, see? Quick. I'll pay you when you come back." And then, "Handle with care, now; it's valuable!"

The package was paper-wrapped and about the size and shape of a cigar-box. And it was heavy. It semed as heavy as lead. It had sagged almost out of Barry's hands when the man had first put it into them. But the stranger had offered no explanation. He had seemed in a hurry, eager, excited, insistent. It had been a queer thing to do, too,

to pick Barry up that way in the street and press him into service And the errand itself was queer —just to carry a box diagonally across the street to a low door in an old brick building, with instructions to deliver it to the man who lived there. Why hadn't the fellow delivered it himself? Why hire a boy to do such an errand—particularly if the employer must wait till the errand was done?

Barry had acted quickly, without stopping to think; partly because he was used to doing what he was told, and partly because the man with red eyebrows had taken a dollar bill from his pocket and held it up for the young fellow to see. He had said, "Want to earn a dollar?" And a dollar for such an easy errand seemed easy money indeed! Yes, Barry had acted quickly—without stopping to think. He had caught hold of the package, nearly dropped it because of its astonishing weight, gathered it up in his arms, and hurried across the roaring city street, dodging cars and taxis and trucks, and leaving the man who had sent him to await his return.

It was night—in New York—just after dark of an early Spring evening, in the world's greatest city. Barry Dare had been on the way to his little rooming-house home in lower Sixth Avenue, after his day's work. Lights were bright in the shops,

the trolley-cars' great headlights glared yellow, the cabs' white eyes gleamed! But the building in which was the door marked 274 was dark, frowning forbidding—like a silent, suspicious old grouch, squatting there among more cheerful neighbors, just waiting to be annoyed—if you dared—so that he could resent something!

The door was low, and opened directly on the pavement. Even to Barry Dare, who was comparatively new to city ways, it seemed an unusual door. There was another door to the building—fifty feet away and up a flight of steps—two doors, in fact, the second one being under the steps, probably opening to a janitor's apartment, or to a basement. But Door No. 274 was dark and low, and stood by itself, and seemed somehow private and aloof. It looked strong, and appeared as if it might be locked and barred. But when Barry put his finger on the button of the electric bell, which was in the middle of the door itself, his push had swung the door inward, proving that it was not even latched. The sound of the bell had come out to him sharply and surprisingly, echoing from the hollow interior. But nobody had come to answer its summons.

Barry had rung again—and again—and received

no reply. Then, standing there in the street before the dark, half open entrance to the brick-walled passageway, he had looked around and across the street at the motionless figure of the young man who had sent him here, and who now appeared to be watching him with a kind of tense expectancy. It seemed as if nobody were going to answer that bell, and Barry wanted instructions.

The young man under the street light over there across the way seemed to stare at him for a long moment, as if he himself did not know what to do. Then abruptly he waved his arm in a gesture urging Barry to go in at the door. His mouth, too, seemed to say, "Go on in—and find out if anybody is at home."

Barry's first idea that the thing was queer came then. Questions as to why this young man acted as he did, so intent, so eager, so unwilling to do the thing himself that he wanted done; questions as to what was in the heavy box, and what was behind this door, which swung half open at his touch but where nobody answered the bell; questions about mysterious things that sometimes happened in obscure places at night in big cities—things that happen to unwary people who rushed carelessly into situations they did not understand, in hopes of gain-

ing unexpectedly easy money; questions like these rushed across Barry Dare's mind.

But Barry Dare was not a quitter. He had a streak in him that made it one of the hardest things he could do to quit anything he had once started to do. Not that he liked hard or dangerous things any better than other fellows did; but he just couldn't feel contented about beginning a thing and not finishing it. His father was like that—and his mother; Barry knew how he had come by that trait. He was as unsatisfied when he had begun something he could not see through as he would be not to see through a good dinner. But he was not often thus dissatisfied—because he seldom quit. Some people said he was a persistent young chap; others said he was a stubborn fool. But it didn't make much difference what they called it, the trait was dominant in Barry Dare.

"You're well named, Barry Dare,"a teacher had once said to him. And the idea that he had a name to live up to had not detracted from Barry Dare's inclination to finish what he started—in spite of the frowning threat of hard work, or the "bright face of danger!"

And now—here in the depths of this mysterious brick passage, Barry Dare stood still, with the sud-

den sense that there was something more than queer behind his adventure. He stood still, with his last match gone and a blind path of unknown length ahead, with unknown conditions at the end of it. And he began to realize that the silence of the place was too complete to be natural, in view of the busy street which he had left just beyond an open door behind him. And he suddenly became aware that there was a certain motionless breathlessness in the damp air about him suggesting that he was shut in, imprisoned, behind a shut door—a door so softly shut behind him that he had not even heard it!

Pitch dark! A kind of soft, smothering black! Dense as folds upon folds of velvet all around him, till it seemed as if he surely might reach out and feel them. And then, when he did reach out—only a dry brick wall, dusty, with bits of plaster that broke off and rolled under his feeling fingers! And everywhere else—empty air!

He shivered, and it seemed to go to the pit of his stomach and turn him a little sick. He felt as a fellow does who has crawled into a tight place and suddenly realizes that he doesn't want to go on, and suddenly feels that he cannot retreat!

He had probably taken a dozen steps from the street door when his second and final match had

gone out, and when the sense of high risk here had suddenly come upon him. He turned quickly now and hurried back the way he had come. His fingers trailed along the bricks; his steps were swift. His shoes scuffed on the gritty cement floor with a noise that seemed terribly loud. It would alarm anyone who might be in the place and who might resent his intrusion. If the distance had been greater he would have broken into a run. But he came up against the door with a crash—head, elbow, knees, all at once, it seemed!

He fumbled quickly for the knob, and found it. Turning it, he pulled. The door did not open. He pushed. The door did not yield. Hastily, wildly, he tore at the knob—desperately with panic rushing upon him like some ghostly horror of this dark, menacing place, hot on his heels, ready to clap great soft hands over his face and smother him! But the door was fast. Shut, locked, immovable as a part of the wall itself, and solid as bolt-studded planking could be, it stood as a barrier between him and the free open, busy street he had just left. He was locked in!

CHAPTER II

COURAGE TO STICK

BARRY DARE had come to New York from his home in Ravensfield because Hubert Macklin had promised him a job. Barry had been attending high school at home when his father, who traveled for a big road-machinery firm, had been hurt in a railroad wreck and laid up, with a prospect, the doctor said, of not being able to work again for many weeks. The only income the family had came from accident insurance, and it was too little to support them all and pay doctor's bills. So Barry, after hearing his anxious father and his brave, fine little mother talk it over, had made up his mind that it was up to him. He could work, he could earn—if he could find a job. And after an unsuccessful hunt for work first in Ravensfield, he had written a careful letter to Hubert Macklin, who had once lived in the home town, but who was a Wall Street broker now, reputed to have made "a killing" on the Stock Exchange. And Macklin had telegraphed him

—telegraphed him!—to come to the city at once, saying he had exactly the job for him.

Barry had "come at once." But when he arrived at Hubert Macklin's office on a Tuesday morning, he found that Mr. Macklin had had a "blue Monday," and had lost virtually everything he possessed in a market crash within a few hours! Barry found him a haggard, abject man, who roused only enough at the boy's approach to say that he was sorry, but couldn't do one thing for Barry, or for anybody else, just now. And as it was obviously useless to plead, Barry could do nothing but go out into the street and face things for himself!

It was then that that quality which seemed to justify his name had shown itself in Barry Dare. His first frightened impulse to run for the Grand Central station and get the first train for home died almost as soon as it rose; for that instinct to stick, to stand by, not to quit, was like the tough fiber of a well exercised muscle in Barry Dare. It responded to strain. Indeed, like a good sound muscle in Barry's sound young arm, it seemed to like to be tested. And so, instead of running away, Barry Dare had stood still. He had thought it over. There wasn't money enough at home for three. His father and mother had trouble enough without hav-

ing to worry about Barry's disappointment and predicament. There must be other jobs in New York for a young fellow who really wanted to work, who was honest and enthusiastic, and who had letters of recommendation in his pocket from men he had worked for in vacations and holidays at home—and who had a quality in him that wouldn't quit! So Barry went out and got the first job that offered; and that was a place as messenger for one of the big broker's offices. Howard & Howard was the firm. His letters, his frank eyes and his honest story of how and why he had come to New York, and why he didn't want to go back home jobless, had got him the place. The man who had hired him had looked at him with respect.

Two weeks of earnest work, during which he had tried hard to swallow his pride and be a good messenger, though he knew he ought to be able to get a better job, had done three things for Barry Dare; it had made Glen Sales, the office manager, like him; it had made him familiar with the parts of the city where most of his work took him; and it had made him an enemy!

A fellow named "Mort" Binch was the enemy. He was a year or so older, and at least ten pounds heavier, than Barry; and he was a fellow who be-

lieved that the way to get along well in the world was to "beat up" the fellow who got in your way. And because Barry wanted to work and Mort wanted to loaf, Barry was inevitably, and almost immediately, in Mort's way! For Barry's swift promptness, his vigorous activity, his earnest determination to give good service, and his careful accuracy in carrying out instructions, set a standard in the office that a shuffling bully like Binch found most inconvenient and uncomfortable.

Binch had taken up the matter with Barry Dare.

"Say," he said, "what kind of a game *is* this?"

"What game?" Barry had asked.

"You comin' in here to this office, an' doin' the way you do," complained Mort vaguely.

"How?" inquired Barry.

Binch did not know just how to express it. "Aw, tryin' to make a hit with the boss!" he said. "Gettin' here before anybody else, an' always workin' overtime, an' talkin' pretty to Glen Sales and the girls—an' all that! Yuh little—*sweetie!*" All the contempt and hatred he could pack into a word were in that epithet.

Barry hated the goody-goody stuff as much as anybody on earth. But he knew that he *had* to have this job, and he *had* to make good; and the

only way he knew to make good was to do as much as he could for Glen Sales and for Polly Wentworth and Irma McBride, who worked in the office. Barry's theory was that the only thing people paid you money for was for doing something for them; and that the only way to get them to pay you more money was to do more things for them. Barry wanted to earn more money—all the money he could.

But Binch wanted to hold his job the easiest way; and Barry not only did not adopt an easy way, but he made Mort Binch look like a loafer by contrast—a loafer in danger of having to work harder or lose his own job!

So Mort had undertaken to beat up Barry Dare. That was his method. Beat him up, scare him, intimidate him, then rule him—that was Mort Binch's scheme with any fellows he came into contact with—unless they were bigger than he was. And one night when Barry was leaving the office, Mort met him at the mouth of a near-by alley.

"Hello, baby-doll!" was Mort's hail.

Barry felt what was coming; he was in for a fight. And he knew before they started that Mort Binch could whip him. But he didn't run away.

"You needn't pick a fuss with me, Binch," he

said. "You don't have to have it in for me just because I want to make good."

"Yeh! Make good!" sneered Binch. "I'll beat yer good little bean off you!" And that was what he proceeded to try to do. He hit Barry in the face —a blow that cut his lips against his teeth, and brought the hot blood pouring out over his chin. And he followed up the dazed boy with a swing that caught him in the eye and nearly blinded him. Binch knew how to fight; he had been taught in a tough school which thrived in the back streets and area-ways and cellars over Greenwich Village way. Indeed, there was an older Greenwich Village gang, notorious for robbery and violence; and fellows like Mort Binch, not yet in the criminal class, were being educated on the edge of it, as it were. Barry wondered, when he first learned who Mort's associates were, how that young fellow had ever gotten a place with Howard & Howard.

But Mort new how to fight; he could swing his whole body in a blow and put all his weight behind a fist; and he new where to strike to hurt and daze. Barry Dare, younger, not so big, experienced only in boyish fights that had only temper and not hatred in them, and who had never had enough of these to dream of training for them, was an easy victim.

That is, Barry could be "licked," as Mort called it—beaten into dizziness and inability to defend himself and apparent defeat. And that was what had happened to Barry that night.

But to Barry, after Mort Binch had beaten him up, and had gone off laughing with "Gansy" Vleet, who was his leading admirer, the "licking" was not at all equivalent to defeat. Because, to *defeat* Barry Dare, you would have to bring him to a point where he was ready to quit. And Barry Dare was not a quitter. So Barry had gone on with his work next day—and the next. And he had faced the grins and sneers of Binch and Vleet and others who traveled their path and their pace, and kept his mouth shut. He said literally nothing about the fight to anybody. To some of the boys who had become Barry's friends, Barry's bruised face and silent tongue only created a mystery. Glen Sales, his immediate chief, said, "Any kid who can keep his mouth shut about his troubles must be good!" And that encouraged Barry to continue his silence. And when Mort Binch realized that Barry had not "squealed" to Glen Sales, or sought any help or solace from any older person, and that Barry intended to go right on doing the same things he had done before in his effort to make good, Mort Binch began to see that

Barry Dare was not going to be so easy to handle as Binch wanted to handle him.

"I'll get you, though, kid," he whispered darkly in the office one day when they waited on the messengers' bench together. And Barry knew that Mort Binch would try. But Barry didn't think for more than a minute about running away. Somehow running away seemed to Barry the only realy shameful thing about being "licked." He didn't answer back; he didn't know what to say. But he could feel that tough fiber inside of him growing hard and tense, like something with its back up. "I won't quit!" he said. "I won't quit! Here's where I stick!" But he didn't say a word to Mort Binch, in answer to Mort's threat.

That was what was back of Barry Dare and the adventure that had now brought him into the dark passage, where sudden mystery had made him hesitate and had driven him back to find a solid door locked across his way of retreat! He was on the edge of retreat, certainly. But that did not mean that he would give up his errand. He wanted to understand, to get his bearings, to know what his problem really was! And—he was scared!

He fumbled with the knob of the locked door in the smothering darkness. It seemed to have no hard-

ware fittings around it; no keyhole, no bolt, no bar, no chain, no device of any kind with which to lock a door. Yet it was locked—so solidly, tightly locked that his most desperate efforts could not make it stir by so much as a tremor. It might have been spiked in its place, bolted in solid concrete, so immovable was it.

Panic! That dreadful thing, panic, which robs people of all sense of all power to think, when it takes hold of the mind, was like a mad beast, yapping and snapping at Barry's heels. But when Barry realized that he could not open the door, and turned with his back to it, facing whatever there might be there in the passage, it was suddenly deathly still again. The tumult that his fear had seemed to bring about his ears seemed to draw swiftly back and away, as if it were something that was itself afraid in turn of a fellow who faced it with set teeth and his back up!

Barry found himself panting and sweating as if he had run a fast hundred yards instead of a scant twenty feet. That gave him a sense of being a fool. What had he run from? But that was what made the thing so terrifying—he didn't know! It was the mystery of the stillness, his queer errand, the darkness, his preconceptions of the city's night dan-

gers—and the shut door! Nothing else! He shivered; no, nothing else. But that seemed plenty. And yet, nothing was here, so far, to do him any harm. Besides, even if something were here and now softly, slowly, stealthily creeping upon him, what would be the use of yelping and shrinking and tearing at a door he could not pass?

So he stopped and stood still. He tried to think. Well, why should anybody who might be here want to injure a messenger who had merely come in here under instructions to deliver a package? He tried to analyze just what it was that he had been subconsciously expecting. Had he thought of the tales he had read and heard, of underground dens where terrible things happened to people who entered there ignorantly? But the reasons why such things happened to such people in such places were either that they had discovered some secret of a place that would make them dangerous witnesses before the law against it, or because they possessed money or jewels or something else of value that gangsters and thieves might want. And then, back into his mind, as if spoken again by the voice of the man with the red eyebrows, came the phrase of his instructions:

"Handle with care, now; it's valuable!"

CHAPTER III

STILL STARS

But he was trying to deliver the package here, to find a man to give it to—presumably the only man the sender had expected him to find here. Then why be afraid? Even if the door had flown shut, and locked itself with a concealed spring lock, or something. behind him! B'r'r! What a fool a scare can make of a fellow! The thing to do was to call out, of course—yell—arouse anybody who might be here—go ahead to the end of the passage and find out what all this meant!

"Hey!" he shouted suddenly on that impulse. "Hello! Anybody here?"

The place echoed like a well. " 'Ere, 'ere, 'ere!" it sang back at him thinly.

In spite of himself Barry Dare shivered again. But two things made it impossible to drop back into the funk that had held him. One was that the noise he had made must have fully apprised any lurking

enemy that he was here and that his errand was a frank one, and that this must make any attack upon him unnecessary and absurd; and the second was that he felt again that necessity to finish what he had started.

"Hey!" he shouted again. "Anybody home?"

"'Ome, 'ome, 'ome!" intoned the hollow echo, with the ring of the well in it. And nothing else answered!

"By the great horned leetle beetle!" muttered Barry, using half unconsciously a phrase used by queer old Daddy Simeon Spinner, janitor at the Howard offices. "Old Simp" as the boys called him, was a character, who had more queer expletives and epithets and ejaculations than had ever been listed in any book. "Rubber *hat*!" he would say. "Hair on a horse!" "Hooly spazaroozles!" "Great snats!" "Merciful clockwork!" These were out of his repertoire, at which Barry had often laughed during his brief acquaintance with the old man, who enjoyed nothing more than provoking the laughter.

It was a good sign, Barry thought quickly, that he should think now of one of Old Simp's funny phrases. Must be he was not so much scared as he had thought he was. Oh, all right, then, he wouldn't be scared at all! And he straightened up, shivering,

with his breath caught in his throat, and started to step once more, slowly, along that passage, feeling his way by the dusty, crumbly wall, and carrying, tightly hugged with one arm against him, the "treasure," whatever it might be, that reposed in that heavy box.

"So heavy! What could it be?" he thought suddenly. "Was it—gold?"

Of course, that seemed ridiculous! But somehow the idea stuck to the heavy box. From that moment, in Barry Dare's mind, the contents of the box looked yellow and bright and gleaming—like a mass of gold. Sometimes he saw it as a "brick," with grinning recognition of the absurdity of a *real* gold brick; sometimes he saw it as "dust"—as if anybody dealt in gold-dust anywhere but in gold regions; sometimes as rows of coins with milled edges, glinting beautifully fresh from the mint! But gold it seemed to be—though when he thought coldly about it, he knew it was wildly absurd! And yet——!

"By all the stibbly little straggle-bugs!" he whispered, trying to bolster up the fresh beginnings of courage with another of Old Simp's favorites. Then, "I wonder what a straggle-bug is! If I ever get out of here I'm going to find out, and——"

But he did not finish the resolve. He was pacing his way along the passage again determinedly now. One, two, three, four steps—five, six, seven—and nothing was happening to him; eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve—and so frightfully still ahead! Great Spaddling Wonderlilies! Here was the unlucky thirteenth step! What sort of a wallop would——? He stopped short.

Nothing happened! Absolutely nothing. Not a breath, not a rustle of falling grit, not an echo of an echo! Dead, dread silence!—like the black inside of a buried tomb!

"I wish there'd *be* a noise!" Barry groaned inwardly.

Then he braced his shoulders and started on. Since nothing had happened on the thirteenth step, nothing was likely to happen on the fourteenth, or the fifteenth, or the sixteenth! He wasn't superstitious anyway! And besides, there weren't any more unlucky numbers till twenty-three!

He was laughing to himself, at himself—or trying to. Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three! Hold your breath! Still, still—dead still! Silence you could dig into with a spade, but could walk through with that awful sense of the emptiness of it. Oh, what a kid he was—afraid of the dark!

He took two or three steps now, touching the wall, then took two or three more before he touched the wall again. Suddenly when he put out his hand the wall was not there! It was gone!

He stepped back in sheer terror, and fumbled wildly, here, there, behind. No wall was there! If such a thing could be said of what happens in the dark, the wall had vanished! At any rate it had dissolved into that same palpable, intangible, impenetrable darkness!

The hair rose on Barry Dare's neck. It was if the solid walls had been suddenly snatched away. And standing here in an abruptly wide open space, with no clue as to how wide it might be, his sense of being alone was multiplied. He whirled and made a half rush to get back to the passage; at least it was a shade less bad than this! He crashed against a wall of brick—dazingly! His knees, his wrist around the box—his chin! And the blow on the point of his jaw staggered his brain.

He nearly dropped the heavy box. But after a moment he became clear again; at least, a wall *was* here! Now he could doubtless find the other. He started to walk across, his hand out before him. Two, four, six steps he took. Why, where was it? And then one more—and something was so close to

him that his own breath returned from it, warm against his face. He touched it. A door! A heavy door—but one that swung ajar at a touch, as the street door had swung inward when he pushed the bell. And he had hardly time to think that here might be another trap; for he heard low, distant sounds as from the city's streets. They seemed to come from overhead. And he looked up—and saw the stars!

Stars! Dim buildings all around! Street noises from overhead! Why—a courtyard, of course! He had come by a low passageway, through a building from street to court! Unmolested.

But here—what was this? In the wide open space between towering buildings of brick, in high windows of which a light gleamed here and there faintly, stood a house! A complete house—wide porch, shadowy doorways, gleaming windows, overhanging roof! Complete, quiet, dark—unbelievably unreal, here in this strange place for a frame house to be! Unlighted—silent as if deserted! Hidden away here behind brick barriers, from a city to which it was utterly unlike, open only above, to the high, still, watchful stars!

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE INSIDE A HOUSE

THE fact that sounds came into this deep court—sounds that ascended from distant streets, to float over the tops of buildings and down in here—seemed presently to Barry only to emphasize the silence. He stood before the dark porch of the house in the court, and stared and wondered. He had never heard of such a thing as a house within a house. But here it was—such a house as he had lived in, in his own home town, not just like it, of course, but of the same kind, standing here in the heart of a city block, isolated from all access to the streets. Here was enough to make a mystery, if there had been none before!

Barry mounted the lightless steps slowly. It seemed useless to ring or knock at a house where no light showed and no sound indicated life within. But he went forward. The glass in the front door glimmered at him. And suddenly a dark figure

seemed to stand just inside there, behind the dim crystal barrier, facing him, motionless, waiting!

Barry halted. If someone were there, surely that someone would hear and see the strange messenger outside and open the door. But the figure that peered out of the glass at him did not move. Silently it seemed to stare at him, as if marvelling at, or angered by, his presence there, but intending no movement until he should make one. And then Barry put out his hand to knock on the glass—and the dark figure within duplicated the action—and instantly he realized that it must be a reflection of himself in the glass.

Half disgusted with himself for his own jumpiness, but with his nerve just a little more strained by the weirdness of this experience, Barry found a push-button that suggested a bell. He pressed his finger on it, and heard, far away within the dark interior of the place, the whir of an electric buzzer. Then silence again—soundless responselessness, with nothing to break the stillness except those muffled, distant noises coming in overhead from the street!

Barry tried the door. It was fast. He glanced at a nearby window—and saw in through a curtainless pane to a rugless floor on which a beam from some

lighted window of the surrounding buildings gleamed dully but betrayingly. Why, the place seemed empty. He went over to the window and peered in. Dimly he could discern that there was no furniture within. The place seemed tenantless. Impulsively he tried the window. It was locked.

He came to a standstill here, apparently at an end of his strange errand. So far as he could see, he had come as far as he could come. But with instructions to deliver his package to "the man you will find there," he had found no man in the place! He was standing still, debating what he should do, when suddenly he became aware of the sound of a stealthy step. A board creaked. At first he thought someone was in the porch behind him, and he whirled to see. Then he knew the sound was within the house. He turned once more and gazed at the window through which he could see that patch of gleaming floor. And his heart stopped beating for a long, cold moment, as he saw a pair of man's feet, in an obviously tiptoeing, creeping movement, step into and out of that faint light, and disappear!

Scared now in all reality, Barry Dare whirled to flee. But an impulse seized him to look into the glass of the hall door, where he had thought a moment ago he had seen a standing figure. Could

those creeping, retreating feet be illusions, too? But the glass in the front door was dark and blank, and as he moved now before it, no corresponding reflection was there!

The figure he had taken for reflection had been real!

The young messenger turned and bolted. In a single leap he reached the steps. In another he was again on the cement pavement which formed the door yard of the hidden house. Once here he backed away from the house in the direction from which he supposed he had come. With his eyes on the dim building he crept away from close proximity to it. He was quaking with excitement and apprehension now. After a moment he became aware that he was close to the trunk of a large tree whose branches overhead were now visible against the star-studded sky. His feet trod upon a bit of sod, as he approached the trunk, as if the tree stood in a circle of open earth in the midst of the pavement. He shrank close to the rough bark of the trunk with an instinct to seek shelter.

The house seemed as dark and still as ever now. But, to Barry, who knew that someone was hovering about within, it seemed alive. Sounds that were not sounds, glimmerings of lights that were not

lights, movements that were not movements, seemed everywhere. Barry was both afraid to stay and afraid to run. So his instinct to go through with an undertaking, once he had started, tipped the balance again. He stood still beside the tree. Then with a notion of better concealment, he crept around the trunk and peered from behind it.

It was perhaps a long two minutes before he heard the scrape of a foot on the cement pavement of the yard. A whispering, papery scrape, hardly louder than a hoarse breath, and utterly uncertain as to its location. Barry could not decide at all where it was, for even its faint sounds produced instant whispering echoes from the walls about. Immediately the court seemed full of menace. He could not but suppose that a man who would not answer an honest summons at his door—who dodged silently away from the view of an innocent caller, and who crept away with evident intention of concealing his presence entirely—Barry could not but suppose such a man dangerous!

Again that soft, scuffing scrape of a foot—whisper-like in its faintness—and of wholly unplaced origin! Barry Dare slipped down the narrow circle of turf behind his tree, and lay there trying to stifle his panting breath. The man, whoever he was, was

outside now, creeping about the yard, stalking the intruder, maybe! Intending—what?

The boy was past all notion of calling out now. So strange were all the circumstances of this ill-starred errand, so astonishing the situation, so terrifying the actions of the one human being he had discovered, that he could only think now of concealing himself if he might, until chance should offer escape. He clung to the very grass under him. But he could not bear to hide his face, for he must keep a lookout and see anything that happened.

A soft scuff of the creeping feet came again—and then again. A long minute intervened between the sounds. Each time, Barry, straining his ears, tried to locate the sounds with exactness. But while the echoes from the surrounding walls were not distinct, the tendency of the tiny sound to echo confused the listening ear hopelessly. By turns the young fellow on the grass held his breath and panted, deliberately determined not to make a sound. Sometimes he was sure he could see a dark, crouching figure coming slowly around the corner of the shadowy house; then he would see it quite clearly at another place. Once the soft scuffing sound seemed exactly behind him, and whirled on his back with a sense that a deadly enemy was upon him!

And then all was still and mysterious and stifling again!

Sometimes it seemed as if a dozen men must be in that dark courtyard, so many were the sounds that demanded his attention. Then again he was sure that the one man he had seen must have gone, because the place was utterly still so long.

And then, all at once, a light flashed—a little, round, white blaze, so bright that it looked like the hot mouth of a crucible with molten metal in it. It was an eye of fire! And Barry ducked behind the shielding tree as the beam of an electric torch swung to and fro over pavement and brick walls, across the court and back, past his tree, painting the rough edges of its bark with silver and flooding the grass on each side with greenish gold!

The light was one of those that throws a brilliant beam for hundreds of feet. Wherever it traveled in the dim courtyard it put a bright spot, in which details stood out almost as if under a lense. Here a window-ledge with flowers and a trailing vine in a box—all looking under the light like a creation of precious stuffs and gems; there a tree, transformed by the magic of electric brilliance into a column of priceless metals. In its swing about the place, the bright beam revealed the yard to be nearly square—

bigger than Barry had guessed in the darkness; and it showed the house at the center to be an old, weatherworn place, brown and drab in color, sagging a little out of shape like a thing of wet cardboard, but yielding up none of its mystery at the touch of the torch.

But the man who wielded the torch was invisible. He stood still, out to the right of the porch, swinging his beam to and fro like a giant paint-brush that painted everything it touched for a moment, but moved on without leaving any paint behind.

Suddenly the beam vanished—shut off. Barry's eyes, blinded by watching it, could see nothing at all now. But he could hear! And the feet of the man in the yard came creeping toward him! He could hear them plainly enough—coming, coming—scuffing, scraping, with seeming indifference on the part of the owner as to whether he should be heard or not. Barry turned cold. Had he been discovered by that bright beam? If not, could anything prevent his discovery now?

CHAPTER V

THE SHADOW OF A GHOST

It seemed minutes that those scraping steps approached him. But Barry could do nothing but be still. There was a chance—one chance in a thousand, he thought—that he might not have been seen. If he had not, the very fact that the man with the light felt so free now to make a noise, after being previously at such pains to make none, indicated that he was satisfied that the intruder had gone.

But presently the steps seemed no longer to be coming toward where Barry lay. They were receding! They had turned away toward the right. Barry raised his head. And now he could actually make out the figure of a small man—a figure not much larger than his own strong young frame—making its way, like the shadow of a ghost, toward the dim buildings that enclosed the place. No details of the figure emerged from the blurred general impression; Barry could not have made any descrip-

tion of it other than it was small and stooped. But one thing impressed him; whoever this person was, he was an agile, active man, always ready for a spring, and fearfully poised for flight! And something about his gliding movement chilled the watcher!

A queer impression to get from a shadow—but so real that Barry Dare knew that he was right. That man was small—but he was an athlete, and more. And he was dangerous! Desperately Barry rubbed his eyes and stared to see. But the darkness was deepest near the walls of the surrounding buildings, and the figure he watched melted into the shadow like an ink drop into a blotter. Then, abruptly, the scuffing steps ceased. Silence! And then—the snap of a spring latch as a door was closed!

Barry was at once sure that the man had gone. Also he was confident that the other had departed by the door through which he, Barry, had come in—the door which led to the tunnel-like passage through the base of the building to the street. Leaping to his feet, the young adventurer caught up the heavy box he had been sent here to deliver, and held it poised. Then he started quickly and ran lightly across to the point where the man had disappeared.

Almost at once he came upon the door—a heavy

barrier like the first he had encountered. The knob was unusually high, when his fumbling hand found it, and it turned under his fingers. The click of the latch he had heard, then, had been only a latch! He started to open the door—and stopped. A sudden gleam of light within the tunnel arrested him. The man he had seen must still be there—and must have turned on his light once more. Barry shut the door and waited. After a minute he opened it a crack and listened. He was just in time to hear the closing of the street door at the tunnel's farther end.

It required some boldness to open his own door then and slip once more into that narrow passage. It occurred to him that the man might have slammed the street door just to give an impression that he had departed; and that he might be lurking near it to deal with a trapped intruder. But that seemed unlikely after the noise he had made in the yard. Barry considered turning back and trying to find some other way out of the court, a door through, or into, some other building. But as he looked up and around at the few lights in the high windows, he did not relish the idea. Those lights did not look like the bright frank lights of homes; they were furtive, surreptitious, somehow guarded, se-

cretive, sinister! The neighborhood was an unsavory one; the surrounding blocks might be full of dens far worse than this courtyard with its mysterious house. No—Barry would go out the way he had come in—if he could! After that—well, he would see!

He slipped into the passage once more and shut the door behind him. There he drew a long breath and tried to still the quivering in his breast and throat. Then he moved slowly forward, again feeling his way along the dusty, crumbly wall, retracing his steps. That locked door at the street end of this tunnel could be opened from within, that appeared certain now. The departing man had opened it. Steadily, as quietly as he could even now, though he knew no immediate reason for quiet, Barry felt his way along the narrow place to the door. There, with a sudden recollection of the unusual height of the knob on the inner door, his instinct prompted him to search high for a lock. And when he had found the knob, he ran his hand up the door along its edge. Almost at once he was rewarded; some two feet above the normal place for such a thing, his fingers found a spring lock with a small brass knob of its own, which responded immediately to a push to one side. Next instant, the door of the

strange, secret place he had visited, swung open to his hand and he stepped out into the busy street!

Amazed now at the ease of his release from the place of such strange adventure, Barry stood still for a moment, gathering his faculties. And quietly the door swung closed behind him, almost as if a hand had pushed it—swung shut and locked with a click! Now—he was shut out of the queer world where he had but just now been shut in!

But he did not turn back to try the door again. He looked first to see if he could pick out in the street any man who at all resembled the little pantherish figure he had seen in the shadow. Failing of that among the passing scores, he looked then for the slouched hat and tense figure of the young man who had started him on this errand. What would he say when Barry should report his adventure.

The boy looked across at the street-lamp under which the young man had stood when Barry had seen him last. But the place was empty now. The man with the red eyebrows had departed.

Crossing the street slowly, Barry searched the neighborhood far and wide with his eyes. But the man was not in sight. He had promised to wait here and pay for the doing of the errand; but evidently he had not waited. Had he intended from

the beginning to cheat Barry out of his pay; and had he just waited until the boy was inside the door to which he had been sent, and then left him to whistle for his pay! But Barry's instructions had been to deliver the box to a man he had been expected to meet behind Door No. 274. Surely the young man who had given him the box could not have guessed what would be the outcome of the errand. Surely he had intended to wait and see. Of course! He must *be* waiting somewhere near at hand. He must simply have wearied of the long lapse of time, and had stepped into a store, or was pacing down the block, or had crossed to wait on the opposite side. But as Barry considered each possibility, and as his eyes searched again all the corners, doorways and windows about him, for some possible clue to the other's whereabouts, he became sure that the man was gone.

When he was certain of it—when for long minutes he had stood under the light, showing himself there, so that if the red-browed man were on the lookout for him at all, he could not miss him—and when nothing happened, Barry began to feel a strange thrill.

Here was the box!

Here was the heavy box—the box that contained something "valuable!"

Here was the box that Barry had thought *might* contain—what?

With no one to deliver it to, and no one to whom to return it, what should he do with it? It was surely heavy! Heavy enough to contain lead—or gold! Of course, it couldn't be gold! But—what *was* it?

Barry did not know how long he might fairly be expected to wait here for the red-browed man's reappearance. Could the fellow have taken it for granted that the box was safely delivered after his messenger had disappeared within the door in the wall? And had he meant to get away without Barry's seeing him again? If so, where was the man he had expected Barry to find at No. 274? And who and what was the man Barry *had* seen there—but to whom he had delivered nothing, for the excellent reason that the man had seemed so utterly unwilling even to be discovered there?

The whole affair was shrouded in mystery. At moments it all seemed like a dream, unreal, absurd. But what was absurd about it? There had been darkness, surprise, stillness, a strange old silent building, a lurking figure, a shut door! All com-

monplace enough—when one stood in the light again. And—the box was real!

Barry discovered a clock on a tower not far away, where he could see the time. It was nearing eight o'clock. It was an hour at least since his adventure had commenced, while he was on his way home from his supper to his room. He watched the minute hand creep slowly to and past the hour while he waited. The traffic of the "rush-hour," when people on the way home from business fillled the streets, was thinning out. Presently Barry could easily scan everyone within sight, without hurry or difficulty. And still the man he looked for did not appear. Five minutes after eight—ten minutes—fifteen! Oh well, what was the use?

But a chill slipped up and down his spine, as he contemplated going home—and taking this strange burden of his with him—this strange box, that might contain—anything! What should he do with it? If he could not find the men it belonged to to-night, could he find them tomorrow? When could he find them?

Should he ask help—or advice? Whom should he ask? Glen Sales, at the office? But Sales would only know what Barry might tell him about the affair. Of course, the only clue to ownership of

the box would be likely to be in the box itself. And if the box were to be opened, Barry might as well be the one to open it!

Slowly, at last, the young fellow started to turn away. As he did so, he found someone standing close at his elbow. He had heard no one approach him. He looked up—into the leering, ugly, and now immensely curious, face of young Mort Binch.

"What is it?" demanded Mort, nodding knowingly at the box under Barry's arm.

CHAPTER VI.

A FORTUNE IN HIS HANDS!

BARRY hesitated as to what answer to give to Mort Binch. Certainly he did not intend to tell the story of the box.

"It's something I have to deliver," he replied presently, as the only way to put the other off.

"Yeh!" said Mort. "Well, why don't you deliver it?"

"That's my business, Mort," returned Barry as quietly he he could. "You keep out of this."

"Huh! Keep out of it, eh? No, I'm in on it, see?"

Barry turned away. He knew Binch would force a fight on him again; but he would try to avoid it. He would not run away, however.

"Hey!" exclaimed Mort, catching at his arm.

"Keep away from me, Binch!" warned Barry, determination hardening in him. He might be in for another beating at Mort's hands, but he would not

let Mort meddle with the box, as he plainly intended to do.

Binch grabbed at him again. Barry dodged and swung around facing his enemy once more. Binch paused, gathering himself, and rushed. He swung with all his young might at Barry's head. Barry ducked. But involuntarily he threw up his hands to protect himself. The heavy box was in them. Crash went Mort Binch's clenched fist against it!

And suddenly Mort Binch wilted before Barry Dare's eyes. Moaning, he sagged at the knees and doubled over his broken right hand. And the next moment, down he went on his knees, groveling and groaning!

Barry knew he must be badly hurt—a broken bone, perhaps. Utterly unexpected as it was, and quite unintended on his part, the thing Barry had done had been the best defense he could have offered.

For a moment he wavered as to what he should do next. His first impulse was to leave Binch to suffer the consequences of his own attack. But he couldn't help pitying the moaning boy, who now knelt there writhing in an agony of pain.

But the matter was settled for Barry. The big

figure of a policeman suddenly appeared on the scene.

"Here! What's doin' here?" he demanded, glancing at Barry, and then stooping over Mort. "Hey, Kid, what's the matter? Hey!"

He caught Mort by the shoulders and lifted him to his feet. Mort raised his face and Barry was shocked to see how white it was. But the interruption of his mourning over his hand seemed to have brought Binch back to his enmity for Barry Dare. He stopped moaning and pointed suddenly at the latter.

"Say!" he cried, appealing to the officer. "That's my box he's got!" He pointed at Barry's burden. "He's stealing it!" Then he sobbed again.

Barry was amazed. The patrolman seemed surprised also. He glanced at Binch, then looked Barry's slighter figure over.

"Stealin' it, eh? Couldn't a big guy like you take care o' yer own box? He ain't as big as you be."

"It's not his," said Barry, backing away toward the curb. "It's mine; and he tried to take it away from me!"

"Sounds more like it," assented the officer. But he held out his hand. "Come here with it. What is it?"

Apprehensive at once of what an explanation to the officer might involve, Barry demurred. He did not now just why he was unwilling to tell the patrolman the story of the box. But he could foresee that the box would be likely to be taken away from him. He did not want it to go out of his own hands.

"No," he said, from the curb. "It's not mine; and I don't want anybody to——"

"Thought you just said it *was* yourn!" interrupted the officer.

"Well, I mean——" began Barry.

"Hey! Pinch him! He's stealin'!" yelped Mort, in spite of his own suffering, eagerly crowding the opportunity to make more trouble for Barry.

"Come!" said the officer, taking a step toward Barry. "Here!"

But right here Mort made a serious mistake. He looked upon this as his opportunity to escape. He tried to shake the officer's hand from his arm and jerk away. The big policeman quickly grabbed him.

"Here! No you don't!" he exclaimed.

Barry saw what he thought was his own opportunity. He turned and jumped for the middle of the street. He wouldn't run away from Mort Binch; but a policeman was different. Just as he leaped, however, he saw that he was going to land almost

directly in the path of a rushing taxi! His heart gave a great throb; he was going to be run down, hurt, maybe killed! But instinct prompted him; the instant his feet touched the pavement, he jumped again, desperately scrambling to get out of the way. The taxi's brakes shrieked as the driver tried to stop. And then the car slid past Barry, grazing him.

But in the instant when he knew he had avoided being run down, Barry's mind went back to the officer and Mort Binch. And he saw a chance he had not contemplated. Instantly he reached up, grabbed the door-handle of the passing cab and hopped on to the running board. And the chauffeur, who immediately stepped on the gas again, when he knew he had missed Barry, whisked the boy away out of his predicament of a moment earlier; and next instant carried him around the corner and into the thicker traffic of the avenue beyond.

When the car slackened its pace at the next corner, Barry dropped off, only a few doors from his own rooming-house home. And almost before he could realize it, he was speeding up the steps and in at the door, and on up the stairs to his room.

Things had happened at such a pace that the young fellow was hardly able to believe that these

swift events had come so suddenly out of a clear sky into his experience. In his room, he turned on the single electric bulb that hung by a long cord from the ceiling, and dropped down on the bed. For the first time he realized that he was tired. He was panting again from his run through the street and up the stairs; but his muscles were aching with the strain of long tensity, quite as much as if he had been doing hard physical work. He sat still and drew several long breaths. His mind raced.

Mort Binch would hardly follow him, either bringing the officer or coming alone. If his hurt hand did not prevent, he still, so far as Barry knew, was ignorant of where Barry lived. Yet Binch must have been spying upon him tonight, for he had seen the episode before Door No. 274! Mort had probably followed him tonight at least, if not at other times, plotting injury.

Barry looked down at the paper-wrapped package on his knees. He had been calling it a box, in his thoughts. His mind's eyes had been seeing its contents—and seeing them—and seeing them! He found time now to realize why he had been so unwilling to surrender his burden into the policeman's hands. Unable to deliver it to the man for whom it had been intended, and unable to return

it to the man from whom he had received it, and cheated, too, of the dollar he had been promised for the errand, he felt that he was entitled to retain possession of it. And—it was valuable! Whether or not he was really contemplating the idea that box and contents might become his own property, Barry could not have told. Mixed motives confused him a little. He did not really want anything that was not his; but neither did he want to let go of anything valuable that *might* be his! And certainly he did not want to give up this box if it contained—well, money! Probably it didn't contain money. But suppose it did! Suppose it really did contain gold! So ran Barry's thought—in a circle—round and round—sometimes whirling!

He weighed the box in his hands. "Great skipping skifters!" as Old Simp would say—but it was heavy! He looked at it for the first time at leisure and in a clear light. It was wrapped in plain brown paper and fastened with pasted paper tape, such as is now used so much in place of twine. This sealed it. But he would be justified in opening it, for that was the only way in which he could learn who owned it. He took out his knife, and opened a blade. Then he hesitated. Shouldn't he rather return to No. 274, either that night or tomorrow, and

try to deliver the box unopened? But if he did, and if he should find somebody there to deliver it to, how could he be sure that person might be the one for whom it was originally meant? And besides, how about that dollar he was to have received for that errand?

He slipped his knife blade under the wrapper's tape. Next moment it was slit through. Realizing then that he was committed to this act, he took off the crackling cover and found that there was indeed a box within—a cigar-box, as its size had suggested. But conspicuous upon its cover lay a folded slip of white paper, and as Barry raised its edge, he had read the writing upon it, before he realized that it was visible to him.

> There's at least a hundred thousand dollars in this. I'm sending it back. I can't keep it But don't let Cheswick know—nor Canderthorne.

Excitement flamed in Barry's brain. One hundred thousand dollars! Valuable? Why, if what the note said was true, here was gold indeed! A fortune in his hands!

CHAPTER VII

THE FATAL CLUE

With trembling hands Barry tried to open the box. It resisted his efforts. At first it seemed only nailed, with the customary thin little wire nail in in cover's edge; but presently he was sure that there was some more obscure and secure fastening The cover, which should have yielded to his knife-blade, obstinately refused to be stirred. He could thrust the blade well under it, and his prying would spring the pliant board slightly. But it showed no tendency to give at its fastenings, whatever they were.

Over and over he turned the thing in his hands, but no catch, nor bolt, nor secret spring could he find. To all appearance it was just a cigar-box, with "La Rigora" printed in black label on its cover. And except for its strange weight, there was nothing unusual about it. But the note written on that folded sheet of paper said that there was $100,000 in it!

What should he do with it?

A hundred thousand dollars, whoever it might belong to, was too much for a young fellow like Barry Dare to have in his room in a Sixth Avenue lodging house! The place where Barry lived was respectable enough. It was run by a good, but highly nervous, anxious little woman named Pitzer, who had been friendly to him when he had needed it. It was the sort of place a boy like Barry could afford on his wages as a beginner in business life in New York.

It was an old fashioned room; and one of the pieces of furniture in it was an old marble-topped table. Barry had written letters to his father and mother on this table; and once while he had sat considering what he had to say that could cheer up his worrying dad, he had fumbled about half consciously under the marble slab on which lay his writing paper. He had discovered a piece of board across the frame of the table from side to side underneath, doubtless a brace; and between it and the slab was a considerable empty space. As he sat now on his bed, wondering what in the world to do with the precious box in his hands, his eyes fastened on the table, and he remembered.

The very thing! If anybody who might suspect

that he had valuables here should come looking for them, the searcher surely would never think of looking in such a place. And scarcely had Barry thought of it, before he was down on his knees in front of the table, testing the space up under the marble top to see if it would hold his treasure-box. It would! And in one more minute, it did! And Barry left it hidden there, got to his feet, and heaved a long sigh.

But his sigh stopped short in the middle. Through the open transom above his door he heard voices approaching. Mrs. Pitzer's anxious, half breathless tones came in clearly.

"Yes, he's here, I guess," she was saying; "his light's lit. I—I didn't hear him come in. I—we'll just knock. I——" Then she paused before Barry's door and called. "Barry! Barry Dare!" And her thin knuckles rapped on the panel.

Barry's heart was throbbing. He had no idea what to expect. But it was an unheard-of thing for him to have a caller. It must have something to do with this evening's adventure He gulped, and tried to answer naturally.

"Yes—what is it?"

"A gent'man here to see you, Barry Dare," announced Mrs. Pitzer.

Barry hesitated. An idea came to him.

"Well, I can't let anybody in now!" he called up through the transom. And acting on the suggestion, he hastily stripped off his coat and began to loosen his belt. If he were undressed, that would be a good reason for delay, at least, in letting anyone in. He wondered if he had locked his door. He looked quickly at the bolt. No! It had not been pushed into the slot! He stepped quickly to the door and put out his hand to fasten the bolt. He tried to do it silently; but he was agitated, and his hand rattled the bolt. Whether or not this betrayed his purpose, someone suddenly, vigorously, turned the knob, and the door began to open.

Wildly Barry threw himself against it. "Keep out of here!" he cried.

But it was too late. A heavier weight than his outside opposed him. A man's foot was thrust in at the crack. Then a quick shove drove Barry backward, staggering, and a tall, gray man, in a loose, gray suit, stood frowning on the threshold.

Behind the unceremonious visitor hovered Mrs. Pitzer, fluttering, exclaiming, peering. But neither Barry nor the gray man paid any further attention to her then.

"Why can't you let anybody in now?" demanded the man.

Barry flared with resentment. "What right have you to force your way into my room?" he countered.

"Don't try to play innocent!" the stranger sneered at him. "Where's the box you were told to deliver to me at my house tonight?"

But Barry was suspicious. "What box?" he asked.

"Don't stall, I tell you! Where's that box?"

"Well—well who are you?" demanded Barry.

"It doesn't make any difference who I am," answered the other, scowling. "But if it will do you any good, my name is Canderthorne!"

Barry gasped, but tried to conceal it. Canderthorne! That was the unforgettable name that was mentioned in the note on the box. But the note had said, "Don't let Cheswick know—nor Canderthorne."

Barry tried to force his mind to give him an idea on which he could act. At last, one came. He shook his head slowly. "I haven't got any box—or anything else—for you," he said truthfully.

"You *had* it!"

"Had what?"

"That box!"

"What box?"

But the stranger's eyes were roving the little

room, searching. Barry, sure that the precious box was well hidden, did not remove his gaze from the gray man's face.

"You won't find anything here that belongs to you," he assured the other.

"Won't I?" inquired the visitor. "We'll see!"

He pushed his way suddenly in past Barry, thrusting the young fellow aside rudely. He stood in the middle of the room and gazed about. Then he whirled and looked at Barry. The boy had the presence of mind to gaze steadily up at him again. He understood that the man would expect him to glance anxiously at the hiding-place of the box.

How the other could know that he had the box in his possession Barry could not guess. He had never seen this tall stranger before, so far as he knew. But the man seemed sure of his information.

"Where have you hidden it?" he persisted, his frown growing ugly. Barry thought he saw a greenish light come into the blazing gray eyes. He knew now that he was involved in a serious affair, and that escape was not going to be simple and easy. Men did terrible things sometimes to people who came between them and money they wanted to possess. What would this man do? What could he do? If Barry kept still and did not admit that he

had ever heard of or seen a box for the man Canderthorne, couldn't he carry it through?

But the man Canderthorne had turned and was looking attentively at the bed where Barry had sat. Presently he stooped and picked up from the coverlet a folded slip of paper. It was the slip that had been wraped up with the box! Fatal clue! Barry turned dizzy as he saw it. Canderthorne unfolded it and read the message it contained. Then his green-gray eyes came up to Barry's once more.

"Oh," he said; "then you *do* know, 'what box!' "

CHAPTER VIII

A BATTLE TO THE STRONG

Barry felt helpless enough. He was only a boy, after all. He was not sure of his rights. He had no friends to whom he could appeal. His father, who would have advised and helped him, was many miles away, and himself temporarily crippled. Glen Sales, his immediate employer, had only known him two weeks. Mrs. Pitzer was friendly but useless. Barry did not know anything about the man who had first entrusted the precious box to him, nor about the man to whom it was to be delivered. But he did know that the former had warned the latter against Canderthorne.

Who or what any or all these men might be, and who had a real right to possession of the box, if any of them had, Barry did not try to guess. Some of them might be honest men, or all might be crooks, for all he knew. None of them acted as if his purposes and motives would bear daylight. And part of

the fear that unnerved Barry before Canderthorne was due to his dread of being invoked in some crime unawares. The box might easily be the plunder of some desperate theft; and a theft of such proportions might easily involve crime of a still more terrible sort.

But Barry's instinct was against Canderthorne. He would have distrusted and shrunk from him, even without that warning in the unsigned note he had read—and which Canderthorne himself was now re-reading. But the look that the gray man turned on the boy, as he wadded up the paper slip in his hand, was enough to assure Barry that he was unscrupulous, determined and cruel. And he immediately set out to prove it.

He caught Barry by the wrist. "Where is that box?" he demanded through set teeth.

Mrs. Pitzer whimpered. "Oh, please!" she begged.

The gray man gave Barry's arm a sharp twist. "Where's that box?" he insisted, his lips drawing thin over his set teeth.

Barry winced. But the spirit of battle rose in him. Cornered as he was, his resentment of this man's brutality was of the same sort as his resistance to Mort Binch. He had a thing called courage, had Barry Dare. It was a stamina that toughened in

crisis. It was the sort of thing men have who lead forlorn hopes, and fight last-ditch fights, and lay down their lives for great causes. Barry knew it was not a matter of size, or strength, or age, the having of this thing called courage; and he knew that he had it. Not that he was not afraid of being hurt. He was. Not that he was not afraid that Mort Binch could hurt him. He was. Not that he was fearless of this man Canderthorne. He was not! But because he cared so much about not being a quitter! So he winced, when Canderthorne twisted his arm; but he did not wilt.

"Come on; spill it!" the gray man commanded.

And again he twisted the imprisoned arm. It hurt! Cruelly!

For an instant Barry struggled. Then he stood still.

"Let go of my arm!" he said.

"Where's that box?" Again Canderthorne wrenched the arm. Mrs. Pitzer began to cry hysterically and to plead incoherently.

But Barry's back was up in earnest now. Suddenly he bent and caught the side of Canderthorne's hand in his teeth. It was no trick he would have perpetrated in any ordinary struggle but he was in

extremity now. He sank his young teeth into the gray man's hand.

With a furious ejaculation, Canderthorne snatched his hand away. But next instant he dealt Barry a cuff beside the head that sent him crashing against the marble-topped table. And disaster was swift to follow!

The reeling boy fell backward against the end of the topheavy old piece of furniture, and his weight was enough to tip it off its center of gravity. The casters in its legs slid on the wooden floor at the edge of the rug, and the legs went out from under the table. The marble top, the frame and the chair beside it, and Barry, all went to the floor with a crash that shook the house.

Disaster indeed! When Barry struggled up out of the wreck, the treasure-box lay on its edge in the middle of the floor, and the gray man was just stooping to pick it up. As the boy came gasping to his feet again, the man rose and grinned grimly at him.

"Well," he said, "we've found it!"

"But it's not yours!" cried Barry.

"Well, it's not *yours*, is it?"

"No—but it's mine to deliver!"

"I know. Consider it delivered;"

"But you've no right to it! The note said——"

"Where did you get that note?" Canderthorne interrupted.

"It was in the box!"

"Who gave you the box to deliver?"

"A man."

"Humph! Naturally! To whom were you to deliver it?"

But Barry did not reply. He made a sudden spring and caught at the box in Canderthorne's hands. His fingers touched it. But he failed to secure it; and Canderthorne flung him off with a violence that sent him out into the hallway and against the banisters at the head of the stair-well. Rail and spindles creaked with his weight and he clung with the momentary notion that he was going to carry the whole affair over and down with him to the first floor below. And while he hung there, dizzied and bruised, Canderthorne swept by him, leaving Mrs. Pitzer without a word, and ran rapidly down the stairs.

Before Barry was quite recovered again, the gray man was at the bottom of the flight, and making for the front door. But, despite the fact that his case seemed hopeless, Barry had no thought of giving up. Catching the banisters with one hand, he swung

himself around the head of the stairs and went jumping down, six steps at a time. At the bottom he missed his footing and crashed against the big front door just after it was closed by the departing man. This delayed him, for the door had a spring lock, and his first wrench failed to open it. He grappled with the lock too hastely then, and fumbled. His haste made waste, truly enough! But he got the door open at last.

Down the front steps he went and out upon the pavement. At first he thought that the man had disappeared. But a motor was starting up at the curb. Barry looked, and saw a handsome blue limousine just getting under way. And as it slid from the curb he caught a glimpse of Canderthorne's head through the back window as he bent forward to talk to his chauffeur.

A half dozen running steps convinced Barry that he could not catch the car. As he came to a stop his heart sank. The game was up, so far as he was concerned. The precious box was out of his hands. Was it any concern of his that it was in the wrong hands?

But, as he gazed after the speeding car, it passed a light. And it seemed to Barry that its license

number almost sprang out at his eyes. He saw it plainly.

A 27604

Then the car was gone!

CHAPTER IX

THE FELLOW WHO WOULDN'T QUIT

Coatless and hatless, the boy stood on the curb and stared as vehicle after vehicle came swirling by and passed on in the wake of the limousine. Then his mind began to act again.

The license number was at least a clue. There were two or three ways of tracing the man in that car. If it occurred to Barry to question as to why he should so persist in the matter, he would have had to stop and think for an answer. But he did not stop to think of that. He turned and ran back into the house after his coat and hat.

Mrs. Pitzer was whimpering at the bottom of the stairs. "What is it, Barry? What did he take away from you?" she quavered.

"Something he won't keep long!" explained Barry, his confidence rising with his own determination, as if with the boastful words themselves.

In his room again he grabbed his hat and coat and put them on. Mrs. Pitzer herself had already righted the upset table. He jerked the cord that

snapped out his light and ran again into the hall.

His plan was coming clear in his mind. He went to the rooming-house 'phone which was on the second floor hall, near his door. He was a quick witted fellow. He had heard enough talk among the men at the offices of Howard & Howard to have picked up some of the ways of city dwellers. He was acting on what he thought would be the quickest way to follow his man. Under the dim half light of a cloudy old bulb by the 'phone he looked in the worn telephone book that hung beside the instrument, and found a number. Then he put in his call. A response came.

"Hello," said Barry. "Is this the New York Automobile Club?"

"Yes, sir," came back the response.

Barry drew a breath of relief. How the place happened to be open in the evening he did not know. But it was.

"Have you a member named Canderthorne?" he asked. He spelled the name.

"Just a moment," came the answer. And then, after a brief wait. "Yes—Reginald Canderthorne."

What is his address?" asked Barry, much excited, but trying to quell it.

"Who wants to know?"

Barry anticipated a refusal; but he ventured. He had heard club men talk.

"It's purely personal," he said. "But it's important that I reach him tonight. My name is Baron Dare. I'm with the firm Howard & Howard, brokers, 4114 Wall Street."

It seemed to carry an impression. "Mr. Canderthorne's address is 111 Endfield Avenue, White Plains," came the desired information.

Barry held his breath a second, while he recorded the address in his memory. Then he asked another question.

"Just to be certain that he's the man I want—has he state license number A 27604?"

"What? Yes—that's one of his numbers. He has several cars."

"Thank you," said Barry gravely, and hung up his receiver.

White Plains! He knew where that Northern suburb was. For him it was to be reached only by train. But he must go.

Of course, Reginald Canderthorne might go to any number of places other than his suburban home. He might go to a club or to a hotel or to an office in the city. Still, with only one clue to follow, Barry could only follow that.

Racing for the subway, he began to ask himself again why he pursued this mad quest. Was it any feeling of responsibility for a trust? Well, perhaps. Was it partly that stubborn instinct of his not to be beaten? Maybe, a little. Was it a faint hope of profit for himself? He had to admit that that idea was not wholly foreign to his thought. What right had he to think of profit for himself? Well, wasn't there such a thing as salvage rights recognized when one person saved another from heavy loss which, without his action, would have been inevitable? Salvage! He was after the salvage of that hundred thousand dollars! It must be saved—from Canderthorne!

The subway train seemed to crawl—from Fourteenth Street to Times Square. And then he had to wait till he was hot with impatience for his shuttle train across to Grand Central. But he reached the great railway station at last, and just in time to catch a train for White Plains.

In the train he reviewed the events of this strange evening. He could hardly believe that such things could happen, still less so swiftly, and least of all to him, Barry Dare. But they had happened; they still were happening; they seemed likely to happen for some time to come—if Barry Dare didn't quit!

He quieted down a little before the electric train stopped on the high tracks of the suburban station. He had never been in White Plains, and he was surprised to find how much like the city itself it was. Out in front of the station he paused to consider what he should do. Where was Endfield Avenue?

He put that question to an officer, who told him the direction.

"But you better take a taxi," the man added. "It's a long ways, and no cars run near it."

Barry thrust his hand into his pocket. He had had a few dollars left from his last week's pay-envelope—a very few. Maybe he was a fool to go on with this. It was an adventure of doubtful outcome, surrounded with risk, maybe serious. And now it was going to be expensive. Taxis didn't travel for nothing. Well—he'd started! Maybe he had been foolish to start; but he would sure be a fool if he quit weakly now. No, he'd go through —as far as determination, and courage, and wits would carry him!

He went to the taxi stand and gave the address to the starter there. The man looked at him suspiciously till the location of the address sank into his mind. Then he became respectful.

In another minute Barry was rumbling away through surburban streets, bound on another leg of his audacious journey.

"I guess I'm a goop to be so pig-headed!" he muttered to himself. But he would no more have stopped then than he would have jumped off a bridge into the East River.

It was a long ride. Once or twice it seemed as if it were going to last out the night. But at last the cab slowed before the gates of a handsome country place, and started to turn in. In quick apprehension, Barry called to the driver.

"Drop me here!" he said.

The man showed some surprise, but he stopped the car. Barry climbed out. And presently he stood alone in a dim road, which seemed almost without cars for a time after the cab had gone. And he searched his mind for his next step.

He could not guess whether Reginald Canderthorne had come out here in his private car as fast as Barry had come by subway, train and cab. Possibly he had, but probably not. Of course, there was the possibility that he did not intend to come at once, or even tonight. But—here was Barry Dare!

Barry laughed to himself, as he thought of it

that way. There was a certain humor, certainly, in his having taken hold of this case like a partisan, and with such enthusiasm.

He turned and surveyed the country place of Mr. Reginald Canderthorne. It didn't look like the home of a crook, unless crooks were more prosperous than Barry supposed. He did not like the idea of intruding into such pretentious private grounds. There might be watchmen, and dogs. But he was going to intrude. There was a real kick in daring to try his fortunes against odds for the uncertain stake that merely might be won through salvage.

He walked slowly through the big gate of the automobile drive. The drive skirted wide lawns, bordered and islanded with shrubbery. Barry walked on the grass for silence' sake, but kept close to the graveled way. For a moment he knew again that his young body was tired. He was a rugged young animal; but he had been through strain and excitement enough for one night. Rest, however, was not for him, yet.

His mind seethed with the mysteries that baffled him. Who owned the mysterious box? Why was it being sent and hunted and seized? Why was it that a fellow like Barry Dare should chance to be

involved in the affair? How would it end? What should he do next?

He continued his walk toward the house, which sat far back among the trees, only visible because of its rather few and rather dim lights. He paused now and then, to reconnoiter; he preferred to know it early if some suspicious warden or roving Great Dane picked up his trail. But he came out without event upon a circular drive before the house. There, after brief survey of the situation, he stepped in among the cypress trees that were massed on the "island" within the circular drive, and hid himself in their deep shadows.

CHAPTER X

WHITE JAWS

FROM where he settled himself among the trees, Barry could see the front entrance to the house, and had a view of a wide open window on the left, beyond which a dim light faintly revealed high bookcases. On the right were other windows, but so shrouded with curtains that he could not see in.

The house was an English type, built low, with first floor windows near the ground. It was plainly a rich man's home, for luxury and expensiveness breathed from the very walls and shrubs. The soft night air of the country was full of the perfumes of Spring. Barry found a low branch of some shrub that would bear his weight, and sat down upon it, leaning back against some savory branches that supported him like a pillow. It felt good. He shut his eyes for a moment, wearily. Just for a moment!

The next he knew he was awakened by the rush of approaching motor wheels on the gravel, and

could hardly remember where he was. Heavy with the sleep that follows high excitement, he staggered to his feet and looked out through an opening in the trees. The blue limousine was in the drive before him!

The car had arrived and turned up to the house. The house door opened from within; some servant was prompt to admit the master. Barry could see through the limousine's windows by the light that came out through the door. And there was Reginald Canderthorne, getting out of the car, with something weighty in his hands which he thrust under his arm as he went into the house.

The car started as soon as the house-door closed. Barry expected it to sweep away around the gravel circle and off to some garage at the rear of the big grounds. But a sudden commotion arose. There was a shout, the sharp yell of a startled, if not injured, dog, instantly followed by a shriek from motor brakes and the grind of tires sliding over masses of little stones.

"What you tryin' to do—run over the dog?" cried a man's voice from out in the darkness away to the left.

"I didn't see him," answered the chauffeur angrily. "What's he doin' out here anyhow? And

don't you know a car's likely to start again when it's stopped before the front door? Why don't you keep out of the way?"

"Don't you get fresh an' sassy with me, young fella!" answered the man Barry could not see. "I just come over to see what the dog was sniffin' at around here."

Barry started. Next instant his alarm grew suddenly to fright, for the dog, a huge fellow, came padding up beside the car, turned his head toward the cypresses and sniffed audibly.

Barry dared not stir, yet dared not stay! The dog would certainly discover him in less time than it would take the men to make peace. What should he do?

"Rabbit!" said the chauffeur, laughing scornfully. He stepped on the gas and his engine roared with disgust. The dog jumped and shied. And Barry, on the edge of flight, grasped his chance and fled.

He skirted the house, keeping on the sod, and thought he had neatly escaped. After a brief run, he rounded a corner or two and came to a walk. He was just congratulating himself, when he heard the thud of scrambling feet on the gravel drive and

the big dog let out a bellow not fifty feet away that was enough to raise his hair.

Was the huge animal on his trail? It looked like it. If so, a tree was the one suitable refuge! But no tree was at hand that Barry could climb. One enormous oak loomed gigantic a score of steps away. All other trees visible were slender or fragile things. Barry glanced at the house; a rose-trellis ran up the side to the eaves. It instantly suggested a ladder. He had seen trellises like this in motion picures. He had seen them climbed—in motion pictures! Would this one be strong enough to hold his weight—in real life?

But it *must*! The dog was sniffing along the edge of the grass. Something had thrown him off the scent for a moment. But whether or not he was now following Barry, he would be presently, for he was surely coming this way!

Barry jumped for the trellis. He caught hold of one of its cross-bars and tested it. It held! Thanks be! He swung himself upward. And next instant there was a fierce growl, and the dog came rushing from the drive with every evidence of having found what he was after.

Barry was barely out of reach of the big jaws that

snapped at him from below, as the dog leaped, and leaped again. But he *was* out of reach.

Here, however, was a desperate predicament. Here he clung to the side of a house, as literally "treed" by the dog below as if his refuge had been in the oak's sheltering branches. The dog gave tongue wildly now that his quarry was in plain sight but unreachable; and it would be a matter of seconds before at least one man would come running to investigate the cause of such a tumult.

The trellis and its roses offered no concealment. Barry looked up above him. He must climb. Could he make the roof. And if so, what then? But climb he must—he could not descend into those white, snapping jaws—nor could he wait here till flashlights came. He must climb!

He climbed. Hand over hand, up and up. The clambering rose-vines clawed at his face and his hands like live things. Thorns cut like the claws of a cat. But the trellis held!

And then—there loomed an open window directly in his path! Such an inviting refuge! Such a necessary refuge! A refuge impossible to refuse! For just then a man came around the corner of the house, shouting at the dog.

"Hey, you, Duke! What ails you? What are you——"

But Barry did not wait. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a glint of light, as he caught the sill of the open window and swung himself desperately over it. Instantly he turned and softly closed the smooth-running sash. He could foresee how the barking dog might seem to point out the way the refugee had escaped. Then he thought to turn the lock above the sash; this would make it seem improbable that he had come this way, if anyone should examine the window. He had barely stepped back out of the range when the light from below came sweeping up, searching the trellis and the side of the house to the eaves. For the second time that night he was being hunted by an electric beam.

But the man outside could not see him. And Barry had left no trail, so far as he knew. Nothing but the wild barking of the great dog could indicate that anything unusual had happened. With a quaking heart then the boy realized that he had not half so much to fear from without as from within the house!

He began to grasp a sense of what he had done. To all intents and purposes he was at this moment a house-breaker! If he should be found here, noth-

ing on earth could save him from jail, and perhaps prison! The only reason in the world why he was here was a reason he could not explain. He must not *be* caught here! He must escape!

He turned to look for a doorway from the room, and saw a bed at hand. Its covers were tumbled. He could discern it fairly well, for a faint glow of light fell into the room from beyond a jog in the wall, as if a lighted bathroom door were open around the corner.

Barry looked first at the light, speculating as to its source. Then he looked down at the bed again. Great ghosts! Somebody was in it!

CHAPTER XI

LET'S HIDE

THE boy shrank back toward the window again. Was he caught?

He started at the imperfectly seen figure in the bed. He could hardly make it out distinctly enough to know what it was like. All he could know with certainty was that it lay still. But presently he became sure that if a person were actually there, he could hardly be awake, or he would show some sign.

The cross-light from the adjoining room burned steadily, quietly. The room was still. Even the barking of the dog outside had ceased. Perhaps—just perhaps!—the person in the bed was asleep!

Barry took a cautious step forward again. Then another, and another.

Suddenly the bed-covers were flung back and a head came up from among them. A pair of bright eyes gleamed upon him. And then a little body sprang to a sitting posture, and a guarded whisper came from youthful lips.

"You hidin'?"

A child! A little boy, not more than three years old! Innocent of fear, scenting a game. Hiding? Well, that was most emphatically what Barry Dare was doing. Acting on swift impulse he put his finger to his lips; he must deal in things a baby intelligence could follow.

"Sh-sh!" he whispered. "Yes—yes! Hide and go seek! Hide! Quick! Before they come!"

His hope that, boylike, the little chap might immediately be more interested to participate in a game than to identify a playmate, was fulfilled. The boy stared for a fraction of a second. Then he flung the bed-covers aside and leaped out. Next moment he was crawling under the bed. Barry had expected him to be content with covering his head with a blanket; but the youngster was too smart for that. If hiding were going on, the hidding-place must at least be unusual.

Barry ran hastily around the bed. Yes, there was a bathroom door in a niche in the corner of the room. And beside it was another door, obviously opening in the hall. Barry made for it. He had visions of escape by back stairs, to rear doors, through parts of the house where no servants would be likely to be at this time of night. What he would

do when once out of the house again, he did not know. It would depend on whether or not that dog and keeper could be located and avoided.

But he knew he could not hope to keep the little son of the house—if son he were—entertained enough to be quiet for more than a minute or two. His only hope lay in action. Out into the hall he went—a wide, high hall, softly lighted by a shaded lamp at the head of a wide, luxuriously winding stairway from below. Barry turned away from these stairs with the certainty that they led to the front of the house. He would make for the rear.

But instantly he turned back again! A woman in a white gown and cap stood in the far end of the hall, busily engaged over something on a table or stand there. Housekeeper, maid or nurse, she was so much occupied that no movement of Barry's had attracted her attention—yet! Barry drew close to the wall. He was breathless—and cold sweat was breaking out all over him. Surely, if ever a fellow had gottten himself into a mess, that fellow was Barry Dare — and this was the mess! But — he wasn't caught! Not yet! He slid sidewise along the wall, past the door of the boy's room, and a dozen steps beyond.

The maid at the other end of the hall took up the

things she was busy with and started to come toward him. Oh, great scaruzalem! It was all off now! The woman was carrying towels in her arms, apparently, counting them. She had not looked up. In a moment she would. Not a sign of any cover was at hand. Barry could only stand still—and wait.

On and on came the woman—counting, patting, arranging her towels. She was now not fifteen feet from where Barry stood. Suddenly she stopped short. Her head came up and turned, alert, listening. Then she moved again abruptly, and without a glance toward the front portion of the hall where the refugee stood in helpless exposure, she went into the boy's room!

In another instant her voice came out to Barry's straining ears. Bobbie Canderthorne! What are you doing out of bed!"

A mumble was the answer from the boy. Would he be able to tell his maid, or nurse, that he had seen a stranger in his room a moment ago, who had started him on a game of hide and seek and had then run away into the hall? The little boy could hardly fail to know that it was to the hall that Barry had fled. The childish voice rose now to audibility.

"No, no! Not bed! Hide and seek!"

Barry could stand still no longer. And as he dared not to run back past the door now, seeking the rear regions, he had no choice but to take the route of the front stairway. At least there was still a chance that Fate would favor him—if there were such a thing as Fate! He started.

A cold qualm of realization of the mad game he was playing came over him. It turned him sick. Never in his life had anything like this happened to him! But then he had never done such things before. He remembered a phrase he had heard his father use. "Queer adventures happen to queer people!" Then mad things probably happened only to people who *did* mad things! He, Barry Dare, had brought this astonishing evening's series upon himself by the things he himself had done. If——

But he was at the head of the great stairs, looking down. The hall below was spacious, and handsomely furnished with tables, chairs, a tubbed plant or two, huge, thick, soft rugs! No one seemed to be there. If the man who had met the master at the door were still on duty, he was not visible. And Canderthorne himself—well, there was a light in that room away over there at the right, beyond the door to the drive! Probably Canderthorne was there —Canderthorne and the box! Canderthorne in pos-

session of the precious box to which he had no right, and to which Barry Dare had a juster claim!

He remembered how Canderthorne had twisted his arm and flung him over the marble-topped table. Indeed, Canderthorne had broken into his room! Resentment stirred, and his panic dropped a degree. He was getting away with unbelievable things! But, after all, why shouldn't he get away with more, since nobody was really yet on guard against him? He had been virtually driven into Canderthorne's house by the very dog that was presumably provided to keep marauders out! But, being in, might he not yet turn that astonishing fact to account?

He began to descend the heavily carpeted stairs. He did not make a sound; and the fact that the light was so subdued gave him added confidence. Advantage was with him. If he could find a real place to hide, he might—he just might!—put something over on Canderthorne, even now!

But a little treble voice suddenly rang out in the hall above him.

"Man! Play hide and seek—wiv Bobby!"

"Oh, no, Bobbie!" came the nurse's response, impatiently. "There's no man here to play with Bobbie now!"

"I'll say there is not!" murmured Barry.

"Besides, it's——" the nurse started to continue.

"Yes! *Is* man!" insisted Bobbie.

"Nonsense! Daddy's 'way, 'way down in the library, busy. James is in his room. And Morris and Keel are out at the garage. And everybody is getting read to go to bed!" Her voice took the story-telling, picturing tone that she seemed to think would catch his imagination. "And Bobbie Canderthorne ought to be in bed and asleep this minute!"

Barry, poised on the stairs, hoped with all his heart that she would win the argument. But Bobbie persisted.

"Man!" he cried. And then, "No, no! No bed. *Find man!*"

Barry ran softly down the stairs. Next instant he knew that it was fortunate he had done so, for he heard the padding of running bare feet, thudding hard enough to make a noise even through the upper hall rugs. And Bobbie's voice rang out at the top of the stairs.

"Man!" he cried.

Barry could have laughed, so ludicrous was the chase, if it had not made his jeopardy serious again. If the boy should see him again, his eagerness for further acquaintance might be as bad as the dog's!

Barry swung himself past a great carved newel-post that bore a tall light at its top, and looked from behind this protection up at the little figure in white pajamas that appeared at the head of the flight.

For a moment Bobbie paused where he was, searching the space below with his keen young eyes. Then he started to come down stairs.

"Bobbie!" called the invisible nurse peremptorily.

But Bobbie, holding on by the banisters, descending backwards, came determinedly on, planting his small feet carefully on each stair and then feeling for fresh footing on each stair below, anxiously glancing over his shoulder in eager hope of a glimpse of his quondam playmate.

"Man!" he repeated aloud, half to himself. "Man!"

CHAPTER XII

THE WINDOW-SILL

BARRY decided that he had made a distinct hit with his new young acquaintance; but it might easily prove disastrous. Taking an angle that would keep the banisters between himself and the boy, he took advantage of the moment when Bobbie settled down to the serious business of descent, and crossed to the wall on the library side of the big reception hall. Here he slid past a palm and a fern and a table, and approached the library door.

But the nurse upstairs was not idle.

"Bobbie!" she cried. "Come back here! You can't go down stairs!" And her voice revealed that she was approaching.

But Bobbie thought he could go down stairs. At least, he kept on going. Barry slid in beside a tall blue Japanese vase close to the library door. This vase, as high as his head, afforded him some protection. At his right, within reach, was the door

beyond which Canderthorne was probably at that moment sitting. Bobbie would doubtless come running to this door as soon as he reached the bottom of the stairs. What then?

But almost immediately it became improbable that Bobbie would reach the bottom of the stairs. The nurse, still calling out to him, but modulating her voice now as if fearful of disturbing the master, came running to the stairway and down after the boy. Before Bobbie had negotiated half the flight she was upon him!

"Now, now, Bobbie!" she protested, picking him up in her arms.

She started up stairs. Instantly Barry seized his chance and looked around the jam of the library door. And instantly he dodged back! For not ten feet from him, seated at a massive desk, his face in profile to Barry, sat Reginald Canderthorne. And before him, on the desk, sat the fateful box—open!

But Barry had no time to think. If things had happened fast that night, they began to happen faster now! He had no sooner looked in at Canderthorne, and dodged away, than Bobbie, on the stairs, recognizing that he was being balked in his intention to find the "man" whom he pursued, raised his voice in lamentation. Indeed, he protested

mightily. In fact, he yelled! And his yell was of the sort that makes hearers always fear the worst. It was as if Bobbie were being scalped, at least!

"Wa-agh! Baw-aw-aw!" screamed Bobbie. "Ah—ee—oh—ah—ch!" It sounded like that. And Bobbie had a voice that pointed plainly to a prospective success as a yell-master, or a radio announcer, when it should be really ripe!

Barry had no doubt at all what would happen next. And the next clear moment he had, he realized that it was happening. He heard a thud as a chair was hastily pushed back in the library; then a swift soft step on a rug and a loud one on a bare threshold—and Reginald Canderthorne, tall and gray—and looking too old and careworn to be the happy father of a little chap like Bobbie—went brushing by, close enough to have touched Barry in passing!

"Here, here! What's the matter?" he called to the nurse, interrupting Bobbie's mourning. Then, in the lull which followed, he went on to the stairs, inquiring for details.

But opportunity again stood before Barry. Opportunity that caught away his breath! There on Canderthorne's desk in that momentarily deserted library stood the prize he had vaguely hoped some-

how to reclaim by his wild adventure here. It was as if Chance had again played into the hands of the fellow who wouldn't quit. Of course, with each step he had taken since his strange experiences had begun tonight, he had become more deeply involved. He was nearer to his prize, yes—but also nearer to catastrophe and failure! But a kind of charm seemed to favor him. "Fortune favors the brave!" he thought, in a flash, as he hesitated. "You deserve your name, Barry Dare!" "I won't quit!"

Reginald Canderthorne was half way up the broad staircase, intent on reprimanding the nurse at once for thwarting and for not managing the boy. None of the three had any eyes for what might be going on down stairs. Barry turned and slipped into the library!

A breath of cool, out-door air caught him in the face, and he remembered the open window through which he had seen book-cases, from his place among the cypresses. His plan leaped into his mind in an instant. He whirled to the table; the box still stood where Canderthorne had been examining it. But the lid was closed. Barry leaped for it. Whatever might happen, possession of the precious box was always worth many another advantage! He seized it, surprised anew at its heavy weight; then he

whirled and ran for the low window in the corner. It was simple enough to set the box up on the sill and vault up after it. There he crouched an instant, listening. And Bobbie's voice rose plainly to him, even here.

"Man," he was explaining to his father fretfully. "P'ay hide an' seek! Man! Man!"

"No. No man, Bobbie! You've been dreaming!" came the wise reply. And here they were directly at the library door again! And then, before Barry could think, Reginald Canderthorne came in with his boy in his arms, and crossed toward his chair.

Barry did not dare to move. Canderthorne, intent upon the boy, went to his chair without looking around the room—without even a comprehending look at the desk. But he sat almost facing the window in which Barry knelt, with only a desk-light between them. The slightest stir might attract his attention. The impulse to wait and the impulse to jump were almost equally balanced in Barry. But he knew that if he could gain a moment or two, by getting away before alarm arose because of the disappearance of the box, he would have a much better chance of ultimate escape. If he himself were discovered first, his chances would be cut in two.

Bobbie wailed dolefully on his father's shoulder. His father crooned to him. Barry had an instant to think that a man, even one who could be as ruthless as Canderthorne had seemed earlier that night, must have some good in him to be tender to a little boy. What if Canderthorne really legitimately owned this box of "gold?" What if the man from whom Barry had received it were really the thief For an instant Barry could think of nothing but that.

And then, all at once, Bobbie stopped crying, turned around and looked straight into Barry's eyes!

"Man!" he gasped.

Canderthorne looked up, followed his young son's gaze, and became transfixed, as he saw the figure crouched on his library window-sill. For a long second nobody moved. Even Bobby seemed to feel the suspense. Then Canderthorne's eyes dropped to and roved the desk. He missed the treasure-box. He leaned quickly forward and jerked open a drawer. The gesture suggested to Barry that there might be a pistol there! In motion pictures there always was! Barry turned and dropped off the sill to the sod beside the drive, carrying the box with him!

He heard Canderthorne's yell of alarm behind him, heard him shout the names of his servants.

As Barry ran across the lighted drive he half expected to hear a shot from the window, and the flesh of his back winced at the idea of a plowing bullet! Canderthorne would be justified in the eyes of the law, too, in shooting a fellow whom the law would easily consider a thief!

But no shot rang out. Only confused noises within the house, more shouts, a woman's shriek, bells, slamming doors!

Barry ran out upon the thick turf beyond the circular drive, and took the direction of the big front gates. Where was the dog? He could only hope that the keeper might have grown disgusted with the false scent on which "Duke" seemed to have led him, and have taken the dog to kennel.

It occurred to the running boy now, however, that the imminent pursuit would be sure to take first the route to the big front gates. So he changed direction across the lawn. At that moment he realized that a late moon had come up and that everything was lighter than when he had arrived in the cab from White Plains. He saw a hedge bordering one side of the place, and a break in it that looked like a gate. He ran for that—and presently he was out in a lane, and stooping to run behind the hedge for the main road.

Back in the Canderthorne grounds he heard shouts now getting out of doors. The heavy baying of one dog arose. He hugged his weighty burden and sped on. It would take them minutes to get a search organized; by that time he could be well down the road. He might be lucky enough to catch a ride on a car that would speed him away from immediate capture. If he could but get to White Plains again, there were many ways of throwing pursuit off his trail there. He would not have to get a train back to the city; he could get a trolley down to one of the towns on the Sound, or beg a ride in any one of scores of cars bound out on half a dozen different roads.

He had a shrewd notion that Canderthorne would not start a general police alarm for him. The idea that the box in his arms did not rightly belong to Canderthorne was the origin of that hope.

Down the road, toward the town, perhaps a quarter of a mile, gleamed the bright lights of a gasoline filling-station. There might be a cross road there. It would serve to confuse his trail. Moreover, at any instant cars might pause there, on which he could catch a ride. He ran that way along the shoulder of the paved road, keeping off the slab.

And now pursuit seemed strangely slow. No

sounds rose on the road behind him. Glances back showed the Canderthorne place lying under what seemed perfect peace. Its lights seemed dim again; its shadowed grounds utterly quiet. Perhaps they were telephoning an alarm far and wide!

But Barry had not yet reached the filling-station, when he saw the sweep of a motor head-light through the Canderthorne trees and knew that a car was out to scour the roads. It would take less than two minutes for it to cover the distance he had come—if it came this way!

CHAPTER XIII

INTO DISGUISE

The filling-station was a bright spot, visible for miles across country. Anyone who approached it could be seen for half a mile up or down either of the two roads that crossed here. But Barry circled out into the fields and came up on the side opposite to the Canderthorne place. He did this for two reasons. One was that he would so keep pursuers from seeing him at once; the other was that he saw a heavy truck standing in the parking space on the far side of the station, and it suggested a new idea to him.

The truck proved to be undergoing some sort of minor repairs or adjustment. As Barry came up beside it, he found the hood up and a bag of tools laid out on the running-board. He could see a couple of men within the lighted station, looking over some small bit of mechanism together. Except for them, no one was in sight. One wore the

overall uniform of the gas-station attendant; the other was in the jumper of a truck-driver. Barry grasped at his idea.

Stripping off his coat, he wrapped the box in it and put it, with his hat, on the running-board on the shadowed side of the truck. Jerking his soft-cuffed sleeves up above his elbows, he seized a couple of greasy tools from the kit and began busily working away as if he were responsible for the truck's general health. But he quickly recognized that he was much too clean to pass muster as a mechanic; and on inspiration he rubbed his white arms with his already blackened hands. Then he clapped both hands to his face and smudged it well. He tousled his hair. He bent to his pretended task again just as the blue limousine rushed up and stopped before the station, the chauffeur sounding his hoarse horn like a cry of Stop Thief!

Both men inside the station came out, looking at the limousine curiously. Out from within the latter climbed Canderthorne.

"Seen a strange young fellow beating it past here just now with a stolen package?" Barry heard him inquire.

The men said they had seen no one. They did not look toward the truck. But Canderthorne did.

It was perhaps fifty feet from where he stood to where Barry feigned to be tinkering with the truck's engine, while he really watched from under bent brows to see what might occur. Next moment Canderthorne started toward him.

The gas-service man and the truckman looked on. The latter raised his head in clear surprise as he sighted Barry. But he stood still a long moment, and Barry estimated him as a cool, decent sort. Meanwhile Canderthorne crossed the open space.

"Have you seen anybody run past here within five minutes or so?" he inquired. "Young fellow—making a getaway!"

Barry couldn't do less than look up. He dared. Canderthorne stood little more than a yard from him, looking straight at him in the clear light of the filling-station; yet not a sign of recognition came into his face. Barry nearly choked as he answered with a taciturn grunt and a shake of the head, and turned again to his "work."

Canderthorne seemed baffled and unsuspicious. He started to turn away. But the gas-man and the truckman had come up. Canderthorne turned to the service-station employee. The truck-driver came toward Barry; and as the latter rose and faced him, the man looked steadily and curiously, half humor-

ously at the younger fellow. Instantly Barry knew he had not wrongly estimated his man.

"Don't give me away," he said in a low tone. "I'm the one that's on the level."

The big driver grinned slightly. He did not commit himself. But he did what not a few such men would do, under such circumstances; he gave the pursued the benefit of any doubt as against the pursuer. As Barry offered him the tool he held and turned again coolly to the engine, the driver took the implement and bent close to his ear.

"Get up in the cab," he said. "I'm ready to go."

Barry needed no repetition of this suggestion. He walked around the front of the truck, almost jogging the elbow of Reginald Canderthorne, as that gentleman told the gas-station employee some story of his own about the night's doings. The boy picked up his coat and its concealed treasure, and climbed up into the high seat above. Under the shadow of the cab he was almost certain now that he would not be recognized. He did not put his hat on; there was far too much probability that Canderthorne might catch some likeness of him then to the young man he had seen last on his library window-sill.

But the truckman was closing the hood of the car. He rolled his tools in their container and stowed

them in a box on the running-board. Then he took a bunch of waste from the tool-box and wiped his hands, listening to Canderthorne and glancing up at Barry. Presently, however, he swung himself to his place behind the wheel and beside his passenger.

"Sit tight!" he whispered. Then to the gas-man, "Well, so long, then!" And he stepped on his starter.

The truck's engine roared. The big vehicle started heavily. Canderthorne drew back away from it as it rolled forward. As it passed him, he glanced up into Barry Dare's eyes. It seemed to Barry impossible that the man could fail to recognize the face with which he must already have some familiarity. But he did fail! And away went the truck toward White Plains.

Barry hugged the recovered box close against him. He was almost ready to doubt his own senses, as his mind ran over the things that had happened to him since he had first taken the thing into his hands. He remembered stories of mysterious boxes, usually heirlooms, which were said to carry curses with them to everybody who came into possession of them. He grinned a little as he considered the idea in relation to this box—of gold, or whatever it

was! But he, Barry Dare, had never touched anything else that had caused such a commotion in his life. Maybe it *was* an adventure-box, at that! Perhaps, like Pandora's box of troubles, here was a box of adventures—a box out of which adventures miraculously leaped constantly, to make things hot for anybody who handled it.

Then he looked up at the big truckman beside him. The truckman was examining him, attentively between glances at the road ahead.

"Where to, kid?" the latter inquired, shouting above the roar of the truck's exhaust.

"White Plains!" answered Barry, shouting also. It might be as well not to tell too much, yet.

"What was the old guy after you for?" yelled the truckman.

"Well," began Barry and hesitated. Then he told the simple truth. "A man gave me a box to deliver. I don't know yet what's in it, but there was a note with it that said, 'Don't let Canderthorne get it.' This man that chased me is Canderthorne. I don't know how he knew about my having the box, but when I couldn't deliver it, because—well, because nobody was at home—I took it home with me. And Canderthorne came to the house and took

it away from me. I followed him—and got a chance to get it back."

Barry paused. The tone he had to use to make his companion hear made it seem as if he were broadcasting his story to the whole dark countryside. But no none seemed to be at hand to hear. While the truckman seemed to consider his tale, the boy glanced backward for the glimpse of the road. Any moment might still bring pursuit. Suspicion might rise tardily in the mind of Reginald Canderthorne. But the truck was piled high with boxes of goods, and no view of the road behind was possible from the cab, except by means of the mirror that vibrated at the far end of a steel arm stretched out from the driver's left. Into the mirror, of course, Barry could not look from where he sat.

But the truckman was looking at him again with a skeptical grin. "He said you was a thief!" he returned, clearly meaning Canderthorne.

"He would!" answered Barry.

"How'd you get the thing back from him?" pursued his questioner.

"Through a window," said Barry, simply. It seemed unnecessary to add all the details. Besides, a detailed story could hardly be made effective against the engine's clamor.

The driver pursed his lips. Then he inquired. "What are you goin' to do with it?"

"Gét it back to the people that own it. "

"Who are they?"

"That's the trouble—I don't know!"

"Eh?" The driver began to grin again. "Sounds fishy, son," he added.

"I guess it does," assented Barry; "but it's true."

The driver's grin ebbed away. He seemed impressed by that plain statement of fact. After an instant, however, he shrugged, as if doubt persisted in his mind.

For a moment they were silent. Then the man looked at him again. "This all happen in White Plains?"

"No," Barry admitted. "In New York."

The man's eyes widened. "When?" he queried.

"Tonight."

The driver looked at a strap-watch on his wrist, then up at Barry again. "And you tell me that you followed Canderthorne all the way up here—to get that box back?"

"Yes."

"Well—you must be good! Or else—the box is valuable!"

Barry winced. He did not want to discuss this.

But before he could answer, he heard a motor-cycle horn in quick staccato demand for attention from the road on the far side of the truck. And out past the driver he saw a figure gliding along parallel with them that made his heart seem to leap into his throat.

"Huh! Speed-cop!" grunted the driver.

And the officer was clearly intending to stop the truck. Barry saw him motion for the driver to draw aside to the right. It could not mean a summons for speeding; the truck was exceeding no limits. It could only mean one thing; the officer must be after a young fugitive who was a passenger on the big vehicle!

CHAPTER XIV

"WHO ARE YOU?"

THE truck turned to the right side of the road and stopped. Through the windshield Barry could see the motor-cycle officer draw up and park his machine directly ahead. Then he turned leisurely and came back, his badge, his buttons and even his eyes shining in the glare of the truck's lamps.

"Seen a kid along the road, carryin' somep'n like a box?" asked the officer as he came up beside the cab on the driver's side.

Barry felt sure that this was the end of the chase right here. He contemplated making a leap from his side of the car, and running for it into the dark of the fields. But he knew that the policeman would have a searchlight that could pick him up before he could make a hundred feet. And then——!

He sat still. What would the truckman, who had befriended him once, say, now that he had heard the "fishy" story? All these thoughts rushed

through Barry's mind between question and answer. Then the answer came.

"Kid?" repeated the truck-driver. "I ain't seen no kid."

The officer's eyes had by this time found Barry. "Who's that up beside you?" he demanded.

Barry's breath stopped in his throat. But the driver turned a glance on him, and then simulated simple surprise.

"Who? Him?" he countered. "He's no kid, is he?"

Barry managed to grin down into the officer's face.

"Who is he?" pursued the latter, scanning Barry as well as he could.

"Why—y," said the driver, dragging out the syllable to indicate impatience of such a question, "he's my pardner!"

Barry nearly wilted with relief. He became conscious that his heart was pounding so that it shook his breast. But the officer in the road was still scrutinizing him with keen gaze.

"Where'd you come from young fella?"

"I'm—with the truck," Barry informed him, with almost no hesitation.

"Yeah. But where's the truck from?"

"Danbury," put in the driver calmly.

"Where are you going?" asked the representative of the law.

"New Rochelle."

Barry began to breathe. He relaxed his rigidity. He began to hope. In another moment now the officer would turn away and let them go on—let Barry go on to freedom!

But the officer's gaze had dropped to the bundle on Barry's knees, under his hands.

"What's that in your hands?" he asked sharply.

It was like a blow under the ribs, that question. But Barry braced up to meet it.

"That?" he repeated, imitating the innocent surprise the driver had exhibited at an earlier question. He picked up a sleeve of the coat that lay loosely on top and held it up. "Why, that's my coat!" he said.

The policeman scanned it. For a moment, to Barry's excited imagination, he seemed about to reach up and snatch at the garment. If he did, out would roll the "adventure-box", and all its adventures would be spilled at once—like the well-known beans!

But the officer did not reach for the coat. Like many a shrewd man, he stopped just short of the

point at which his shrewdness would have produced results. But two things might easily account for his lack of more active suspicion: He had been told, apparently, to look for "a kid", and Barry was too stalwart a fellow to fit that officer's notion of a kid; also, Barry's disguise was good enough to befool a man who had seen him before, and this cycle-cop had not seen him.

"Well," he said, "all right. But if any kid did come along this road ahead of Canderthorne, he must have vanished!"

The truck-driver grinned. Then he waved his hand from his cap in a half ironical salute, as the officer turned toward his own machine. When the putt-putt-sputter of the motor-cycle rose, and the officer was off ahead of a little trail of smoke, the truck-driver swung his levers and stepped on his accelerator. Then he smirked sidewise at Barry.

"That guy needs a spy-glass!" he remarked, letting in his clutch as his engine roared again.

Once more they were off. Barry began to believe now that it would be safe for him to go to the White Plains station and get a train back to the city. The driver seemed disinclined to talk further just now, and soon they began to enter the town again. Barry, looking at the houses, was startled to see

that house after house was dark! Why it must be very late!

"What time is it?" he asked his companion suddenly.

The driver looked at his strap-watch again. "It's 12:20," he said.

Midnight—and after! Barry was incredulous. Yet it seemed many hours, too, since his adventures began. When would they end? And how? And just suppose—just suppose that, after all this, his reward were to be the single dollar originally promised—or, perhaps, not even that, because the box was still undelivered!

Down toward the heart of the town they went, without more conversation now. At last the driver turned his big vehicle into a wide street to the left. Then he slowed down.

"Where you want off, son?" he asked.

"Near the station," answered Barry. "I don't know the town."

"Here then," the driver returned. "Go straight down that street till you come to the tracks—and then left one block to the station."

Barry started to take up his bundle. The driver laid an arresting hand on his arm. "Look up here, young fella," he said.

Barry looked. There was light enough for them to see each other's eyes. The driver's were large and dark, and had in them a light of sympathy and good fellowship that warmed the boy's heart.

"Are you on the level, kid?" the man asked.

Barry nodded. The other watched his eyes an instant.

"I guess you are," he concluded. "If you are—it's o. k. If you're not, I helped you because you looked good to me. If you ain't straight, why' you've put somep'n over, for *this once*. But if you are straight, you'll be a big success—because you got grit, an' wit—an' you don't quit!" He grinned again, at his unintentional rhyme.

"I am straight," said Barry, thrilling at the man's estimate of him.

"I believe you. Now, go to it. And good luck!"

"Thank you—ever so much!" exclaimed Barry, affected more by the man's words than by all the evening's trials.

"Hand it on," said the man, and began shifting his levers again.

Barry slid down out of the cab and stood on the pavement. His new friend, whose very name he did not know, waved his hand in a wide salute, as he had waved it at the officer. Barry waved in re-

sponse. Next moment the truck was thundering away, leaving Barry alone in the echoing street.

For the first time he began to notice that the night air was cool. But he couldn't put on his coat; the box must remain concealed in it. The problem now was, what should he do with it? If he were to take it back with him to his room at Mrs. Pitzer's, Canderthorne would follow him there assuredly—unless Canderthorne preceded him! There would be no place in the rooming-house, in which to hide the box away, either. He must find a hiding-place somewhere for it; otherwise it would be only a matter of time before someone who new its value would get it away from him.

He walked toward the station rapidly, while his thoughts were busy with this problem. He did not see just what he was going to do with the treasure-box in any event. If he could find a secure place to conceal it, would he then just sit down and wait for the red-browed man to come back? Well, but the red-browed man did not know Barry, nor where Barry lived. To what place would he come back? —to that place under the street-lamp opposite Door No. 274? If so, when? And meanwhile, what would Canderthorne do? And suppose the red-browed man never came back, and suppose Cander-

thorne could be dodged, or eluded, or balked—what then?

But plainly, the most pressing need was for the immediate hiding-place, and Barry could think of none. It was easy to say that there must be a suitable place somewhere in the city, near where his everyday tasks took him. But he could not recall a single place where he would dare to put so valuable a thing. Come to think of it, now that he had a few cool moments in this hectic night, he dared not even have the valuable thing in his possession at all any longer than necessary. A hundred thousand dollars! Why, it would start all the crooks in New York after him, if they knew he had it!—and maybe some who were not commonly classed as crooks! He had already decided, rightly or wrongly, that he did not dare to trust the police. Whom then could he trust? A bank? They would ask so many questions. They would question Barry's right to hold on to the box at all. They would assume the right to hold it; and if the original owners did not appear, what would Barry get?

He thought of a safety deposit box. He didn't know much about them, except that they had to be rented. And he had once heard a man in Howard & Howard's say he paid twenty dollars a year for

his. Barry had no twenty dollars to pay for anything. Oh yes—to be sure!—he had a hundred thousand dollars under his arm! But it wasn't his! Would he be justified in taking out twenty dollars—one of those gold-pieces, say, which his mind visualized as forming the contents of the box—for the sake of hiring a safe place to keep the rest? He was afraid to think of tampering with the money—now. Sometime? Well——

He found the railroad tracks where they crossed the street on an overhead bridge. He turned left and came to the station, just after a late train out from the city had spilled a little crowd of returning theater-goers, who came down through the station, chattering and laughing, calling taxis or getting into waiting private cars, to be whisked away homeward. None of them seemed to have even a glance for the coatless boy with face and hands black with grime and a duddy bundle under his arm. It made Barry feel suddenly very much alone. But he hunched his heavy burden a little higher and went inside the station.

He started for the ticket-office to inquire about the next train, and to buy a ticket. As he went, he thrust his hand into his pocket for what remained

of his money. He stopped short in his stride. His pocket was empty!

What could this mean? He had had some money left after paying for the taxi—two or three dollars at least! What had become of it? He could not guess!

CHAPTER XV

THE OPEN BOX

HERE was an unlooked-for complication. No money! How he had lost it he had no idea. He couldn't see how it could have been stolen. But certainly it was gone. And that meant that he couldn't go back to New York by train tonight —nor at any other time. What was he to do?

If anything else could happen to him—he might say, if anything else could *mis*happen to him—it would have to be unusual! He sagged a little. It was getting to be too much. He sat down on a bench, and weariness came over him in waves. Tired as he was, the inclination to despair was quick to rise! He put his head back against the back of the seat and shut his eyes with the sense that it would be amazingly easy to whimper at this last sudden check!

But the fact that this was such a small thing really, which had brought him up short, after the

extraordinary succession of thrilling situations through which he had passed, was what soon made him begin to laugh instead of weeping! Immediately he felt better. In his mind's ear he heard again the rhyming words of the friendly truck-driver. "You've got grit and wit, and you don't quit!"

"Well, no more I do!" Barry whispered through set teeth. "I don't know as I have any wit; if I had I'd have kept out of this—though I don't know how! But I *won't* quit!"

He reviewed the situation again. He was in a suburb which the time-table said was twenty-two miles out from the city. Many people commuted every day from White Plains. But it must be that many also drove into New York in their own cars.

Also, if there were trucks that went through here to the Sound towns, there would be trucks going through to the big city. Well, it ought to be possible to get a ride. Nobody would be going till morning, however—that is, no vehicle except an occasional truck. If he waited till morning, he could hunt out the most used route to New York, and beg a ride, as he had often seen fellows do. Well, that was that. Meanwhile, some cop would probably come along here pretty soon and make him get out of here. Nobody who looked so much

like a tramp as he probably did now would be allowed to sleep out a night here. But why not sleep a little while he could?

He settled down at the end of the big bench, putting his bundle between him and the solid rail, where his body would press against it and where his hand could be kept upon it. Nobody could remove it while he slept, without awakening him. He put his head back and closed his eyes once more.

The brief nap he had had among the cypresses —how long ago it seemed, now!—had rested him surprisingly. But now he seemed too tired to care that the bench was hard and that he was hungry as well, and that no money for fare meant no money for food—and that he had spent, or lost, five or six dollars in a wild goose chase that might never even bring it back! He just wanted to sleep! Funny —the only thing on earth he wanted to do was sleep!

And sleep he did. How long, he did not know. But when he woke he felt as if some magic had taken all the aches out of his body and had put new energy in their places. But the inevitable policeman stood before him; indeed, evidently it was the officer who had waked him up.

"Well, say boy, this ain't no hotel!" the man said.

Barry straightened up. "I know," he said, "but I haven't got a hotel."

"Well—they's one up the street."

"I haven't got a nickel."

"Eh? What you waitin' here for then?"

"Morning."

"What then?"

"I'm going to get some good natured fellow to give me a ride into New York."

"New York, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where'd you come from?"

"That's where I came from. I came up here on an errand, and I lost my money to get back."

"Errand, eh? Who do you work for?"

"Howard & Howard, Wall Street." Barry did not think it was necessary to say that his errand had not been for his firm.

The officer looked Barry over. "What do they keep—a garage?" he inquired sardonically.

Barry started. Then he laughed. "Oh, no! They're brokers. I got my face and hands dirty from the tools on a truck I rode on."

The officer seemed to conclude that Barry was harmless. More than that, he, like the kindly truckman, seemed to have some sympathy for him.

"Come on with me," he suggested after a moment. "They's a garage right near where they'll let you sleep."

Barry got up, with quick gratitude. There might be some crooks and some mean propositions in the world, but there were some decent chaps too. It sure was fine to be decent, like that! He followed the officer out of the station.

"Put on your coat," the latter said at the door. "It's cold."

"No," answered Barry. "I——can't."

"Huh? Why not?"

"Because——" Barry hesitated and looked down. What excuse could he give? He saw his grimy arms. "I don't want to get it all grease," he added.

The policeman seemed to think this was a sound reason. He nodded and led the way out. It was but a short distance to the garage, and there a word from the officer led to Barry's being provided a place on a pile of packing-quilts in a small furniture-van. "Jim," as the officer called the garage-man, seemed rather indifferent to Barry; but he was willing to accept suggestions from the officer.

So Barry went to sleep again, convinced that, where a fellow sticks to a purpose, the luck isn't all against him.

Morning brought more "luck." Barry was awake and alert when he heard a hearty voice inquiring particularly the road to New York. While the garage-man gave directions, Barry crawled out of his bed and sat on the tail-board of the van. A big, jolly-looking man in a long tan coat and an obviously expensive hat stood near a shining and sporty roadster, listening to the answers to his questions. He glanced up at Barry and his eyes twinkled; and when his conversation with the garage-man ended, he turned.

"Hello, stow-away!" he said.

"Hello," responded Barry, grinning.

"You look as if you spent the winter in the gear-box!" commented the other, smiling.

"I must!" replied Barry. "But this hotel hasn't got a room *with* a bath!"

The man's attention was caught. He laughed. "How much was *this* one?" he inquired, indicating the van.

"Nothing a day!" responded Barry.

"Are you — traveling — or just bumming?" queried the other, eying him with a certain interest, but with distaste for the dirt.

"I am going to New York," said Barry. May I stow away in your car?"

The man hesitated. "Pretty dirty!" he said.

"Well, I think it won't come off on the car. It must be dried on by now."

Again he laughed. Evidently he liked a whimsical view of things. But he insisted that Barry wash and put on his coat. The garage-man gave permission for the boy to use tap and basin, and some soap out of a can that dissolved the grease like magic. So he washed and combed his hair and felt better. He could not refuse to put on his coat now; but he was less afraid to expose the box in company with the man in whose car he was going to ride. He pulled down his sleeves and unrolled the coat. As he did so, he was thinking that he might find an old newspaper to wrap the box in, so that its character would not be quite so evident. But the coat coming free from the box, caught on the edge of the cover and flipped it half open; and it was clear that it had not been secured since Canderthorne had examined it.

Barry's heart leaped! Now he could have a look! A look at that treasure!

He was alone in the corner where the water-tap was. Quickly he turned his back toward where the men were grouped in the middle of the garage-floor.

He drew the box close against him, and slowly lifted its cover.

The light little lid came up as if it had never been fastened. Barry's eyes, prepared for the glint of some sort of treasure, peered over the edge and down into the mysterious interior. But next moment, the whole complexion of his world seemed to change, as he saw how his imagination had led him astray. Nothing like he had expected to find was in the box. No gold was there!

But something else was there that Barry thought he understood. And something that struck sudden terror to his heart!

CHAPTER XVI

HEROISM WITHOUT DANGER

No yellow gold! But a whitish powder that Barry thought he recognized, packed in around a bright mechanism that suggested clockwork at once. And the mechanism was moving, softly buzzing, ticking, as if the raising of the cover had released it! Barry, with his conception of what the thing might be, was ready to drop it and run to save his life!

He had heard of such contrivances, in which a fulminating cap was attached to a tiny machine packed in dynamite, in a box that would become a deadly explosive mine the moment it was opened! He thought of them now, when his eyes took in what the box contained. He had seen dynamite, when he had witnessed stump-blowing on farms near his home. And the ivory-white stuff in the box, surrounding the moving clockwork, assuredly looked like dynamite!

For a moment he stood in abject horror of the

thing in his hands, buzzing like a rattler about to strike! Then his first impulse was to fling it from him and flee, shrieking warnings to the men in the garage to get out of harm's way. For if that box of dynamite should explode in the garage it would wreck the building and kill everyone in it!

But next instant Barry's swift mind had given him a different idea. Far, far more quickly than words could tell, a picture of a heroic act flamed before his mind, and all the reasoning for and against his attempting it stood complete. If there was time for him to escape he thought, there was time for him to prevent disaster! Across the garage, opposite to where he stood by the sink at which he had washed his hands, was the place where cars were washed. It consisted of the familiar shallow dip in the concrete floor, with a drain at the center, and a hose attached to a faucet at one side. Water was running at that moment across the floor to the drain. Would it not be possible to run over there, dump that deadly whitish powder into the drain, holding the clockwork itself in the box, and thus stop the firing of the cap in contact with the dynamite, while getting rid of the deadly stuff? If Barry could do this, he would save himself and others—and the building and all the cars besides!

It was terrible beyond words to imagine that awful thing going off in his hands. If it did it would blow his body to atoms! But he realized that others might suffer because he, Barry Dare, had tampered ignorantly with it. In some sense, at least, he was responsible. He would try—he would try to do what he could!

He did try. Without another moment's hesitation, he whirled and ran across the garage to the washing floor. He was conscious that the men, standing some thirty feet away, turned curiously to look, at his sudden wild rush. He shouted at them.

"Oh—run! Dynamite! It's a bomb!"

What they did—whether they heeded the warning or not—he could not tell. He took no time to watch them. The buzzing, ticking thing in his hands, which he expected might burst into blasting white flame at any moment, was too absorbing. He even forgot to look out for his footing. And suddenly his heel slipped on the wet cement, as he overstepped, and he went to the floor with a slam that seemed enough to break his ribs. But even that did not stop him. He squirmed over and scrambled wildly for the drain, still holding the box before him—like a half-back, determined to use his last breath and strength to shove the ball over the line

for a touchdown. And whipping open the box-cover again at last, the boy sent the mass of powder down the open pipe, while the buzzing clockwork mechanism rolled out upon the floor!

Still in fear lest the little machine might yet fire enough of the dynamite remaining near it to do untold damage, Barry caught the shining little bunch of wheels up in his hands and flung it out upon the dry concrete in the middle of the room. And then sank down into the wet, where he lay and moaned. For the fall had jarred and hurt him so that he turned faint.

When he raised his head a moment or two later, the big, jolly man in the tan coat was bending over him. And Barry saw at once that he had the clockwork in his hand and that it was still. A glance at the drain showed the last of the whitish powder in a little pile by the pipe, slowly sluicing away with the running water. There would be no explosion here! And without shame, the boy who had risked his life to prevent catastrophe, actually sobbed!

"Well, son! Well—what's happened?" asked the big man, putting his arm about the wet shoulders, quite without apparent fear of dirt.

"Oh—it was a bomb! Dynamite!" answered Barry, trembling now at thougth of what might

have been. He pointed at the powder by the drain, now almost gone.

"Dynamite?" echoed the man. He stepped to the drain, stooped and took a pinch of the stuff in his fingers. "I guess not," he said, rolling it across his thumb. "That's not dynamite. Trust me to know. I've handled tons of it."

Barry gasped. "What? Oh, I thought it was a bomb!" He pointed to the clockwork, and then to the empty box on the floor.

The big man smiled slightly. "No," he said. "Your dynamite is fine white pine saw-dust, if I mistake not. And this"—he looked at the clock-work—" this was just packed in it.

"But—but it went off!" Barry cried.

"The clockwork? Well—it was probably wound up. But look; it's harmless now, anyway. And whatever it is, it's no mechanism for a bomb!"

Jim, the garage-man, who had looked on and listened, suddenly burst into a loud guffaw.

"Haw, haw! Bomb! Dynamite! Listen to him! A dynamite bomb!"

Barry's head went down in utter shame. What a fool he had been!

But the big man of the expensive hat did not laugh. "Well, say!" he interrupted. "The boy

thought it was dynamite!" Then after an instant, glancing from the tap where Barry had washed and where his coat still lay in a heap on the floor, to the drain where the last speck of whitish powder had now vanished, he seemed to understand.

"Look here, son," he exclaimed, "you *thought* your were saving all our lives by running and dumping that stuff in the drain, didn't you?"

Barry nodded, miserably.

"And you did that instead of just dropping the thing where you were and running to save your own life!"

Something in his tone made Barry look up. The man's face was grave and kind. Barry nodded; this man understood.

"Well, then," said the other, you were just as brave as if the stuff really had been dynamite—and the whole box a bomb!"

The garage-man sobered and his eyes widened. Then he began to smirk again. "How do you get that?" he sneered. "I don't see that!"

"You wouldn't!" answered Barry's new friend. "It takes intelligence to recognize things like that."

He reached down and raised Barry to his feet. "Hurt, old man?" he asked, solicitously.

The sympathy and understanding made Barry

forget his pain. It seemed funny, but it was true, that he had done a brave thing, in spite of the fact that there had been no danger!

"But I was such a fool to be scared!" he said.

"We're always fools to be scared!" the man answered slowly. "Fear is the only enemy a man really has to be afraid of—because it is the only one that can take his intelligence away from him!"

Barry thought about this a moment. How true it was! If ever people did crazy things it was when they were frightened! Then the inevitable question leaped up in his mind. If the mechanism packed in white powder in the box were not a clockwork bomb—as it most certainly was not gold!—then what was it? And why in the world did Reginald Canderthorne care enough about it to pursue, and to set the motor-police after, the young fellow who had run away with it? Why had he taken it away from Barry in the first place? Why, indeed, had the young man of the red eye-brows tried to send it into that hidden house behind Door No. 274—and to send it so secretly that he should not appear in the matter himself? And why had he apparently run away, before he could be sure it had been delivered?

The mystery was still as great a mystery as ever,

though Barry's hope of profit—in the way of reward for salvage, for instance—had now vanished. Still, maybe—just maybe!—that clockwork was a valuable thing. His new acquaintance was examining it carefully, and it seemed a beautiful thing—as bright as if all its glistening parts were of silver and gold!

"Then you don't know what it is, son?" inquired the man interestedly.

"No, sir," said Barry, beginning to be worried again about possession of the thing, if it should prove to be worth money.

"I don't either," the other commented. "It's some kind of ingenious clockwork device of a high order, exceedingly well made by a man who superbly knew how. Where'd you get it?"

"A man gave it to me to deliver," returned Barry.

"To deliver where?"

"In New York."

"I see." The big man picked up the cigar-box and inspected it curiously. "Humble container for such a little gem of mechanics!" he remarked. Then he fitted the little machine into the box. It set exactly flush within the walls of its "humble container," and seemed to have needed no saw-dust packing to make it carry well. The man closed the cover and

handed the box to Barry. "All right; you'll deliver it yet," he assured him. "But you must have had some reason for thinking of dynamite. How did that ever occur to you?"

"Oh, I've seen it," Barry told him. "And I've read about 'infernal machines', and seen pictures of them. And when the box came open and the clock-work started to run, it was all I could think of."

"I don't blame you," the big man sympathized. Then, "Well, come on; let's get off for New York. Get your coat. I think you and I are going to like being acquainted."

Barry put on his coat, fished his forgotten hat out of the rear end of the van in which he had slept, and presently was ensconced in the luxurious seat of the big roadster, at the elbow of the big tan coat, calmer and happier than he had been at any waking moment since the mysterious "adventure-box" had come into his hands.

CHAPTER XVII

A HIDING PLACE READY MADE

During the breathing-space of that swift ride down to the city, Barry had time to realize how fast a pace life had set for his young feet during the long night that was now gone. Also he had time to realize that his adventures were certainly not over; gold or no gold, it had been the contents of that box which had made at least two men behave extraordinarily; and the matter of its ownership, as well as its character, was still a problem. Also, it was still in Barry Dare's possession, and there was still as much reason as ever to suppose that he might participate in whatever values there were here. But what had that note meant which had said that the box contained "a hundred thousand dollars"?—that note which had been written to warn somebody against Cheswick and Canderthorne!

The journey cityward was rapidly made. His

companion asked him a question or two about himself and where his home was; and when he had a clue to how and why Barry had come to New York, he drew out the story complete. Barry told all about himself, except the details of last night's adventures. And by the time he had finished, the big roadster was running up to the terminus of the subway, at the Northern end—where it should be called an elevated road, because it is!

"Here's where I'll have to set you down, Barry Dare," the owner said, using the name he had just learned from the boy's narrative. "But you and I are going to see each other again. It isn't every day I have a chance to know a hero!"

Barry was abashed. "Don't make a worse fool of me than I am!" he protested. "I was scared to death—over nothing!"

"No you weren't," contradicted his new friend quietly. "If you had been, you'd have dropped that box and beat it without regard to what else might happen. Remember what I told you. The man who *conquers fear* is the only real hero. Don't be scared —don't be afraid of *anything!* Don't let *anything* get your goat—and you'll get most of the things you set your heart on, Barry Dare!"

He took out a handsome pocket-book and handed Barry a card. On it was engraved,

MR. ERRALD WYANT
New Century Club

Barry looked up . "Mr. Wyant," he said, "you've helped me more than I can tell you. I don't know how I'd have gotten into New York if you hadn't brought me."

"Somebody else would have brought you, son," Errald Wyant assured him easily. "But look here —I forgot—you haven't even got subway fare down town, have you?"

Barry shook his head.

Then let me—lend you a fiver," Mr. Wyant said, and took out a crisp bill.

His kindly generosity seemed extraordinary. But Barry didn't need five dollars. Five cents would be enough. He shook his head.

"Lend me a dime," he said, thinking that he'd need at least a roll in his hungry stomach.

The man laughed; and added respect rose in his fine eyes as he looked into Barry's. But he thrust out the bill.

"Take it, son. It's a pleasure to me to have this chance."

Barry put his hands in his coat pockets. "I'd rather you wouldn't—" he began. Then he stopped with astonishment making him forget what he had started to say. Next moment he had fished out from his left outside pocket three one-dollar bills of his own!

"Why—look at that!" he cried. "That's what I did with the change from the taxi!"

Mr. Wyant looked puzzled. "Taxi? Then you have the taxi habit, have you?"

Barry laughed. "I never was in one but once or twice before. But I was last night!"

"And you put your change in the wrong pocket? I've done that." Mr. Wyant put his five-dollar bill back into his pocket-book. "Then you don't need this," he decided. "Your a capitalist!"

Barry laughed again and slipped down out of the car to the curb. Mr. Wyant put out his big hand, looking huge in its buckskin driving-glove.

"So long, old boy!" he said. "Call me up, some time soon, and we'll fix a date for a talk. We're going to be friends."

For a moment Barry was tempted to blurt out his problem and ask this good friend's advice. But he

felt now that if he did, that would be a kind of quitting. No, he would work out his own problem. He put his hand into Wyant's big one.

"So long," he said. "Thanks."

The big roadster started. Errald Wyant grinned back at him and was gone. Barry went up the long stairs to the trains, and got one that rushed him away down into the city, presently plunging under ground and roaring through the tremendous tunnel under New York's busy streets, to spill him out at a station half an hour later, only a scant three blocks from Mrs. Pitzer's house.

He felt rather strange as he walked through the familiar, sunlit streets, and remembered what had happened to him here only last night. Why, was it only last night? Somehow, it seemed days ago! It seemed as if quantities of things must have happened, too, while he had been away!

As he approached the building where he lived, however, he had an impulse to pause. A man who had been so anxious to get the box away from him as Canderthorne had been last night would be very likely to try again to get it. And having failed last night in his pursuit of the boy who had snatched it away from him, he would be only too likely to try to catch Barry once more this morning! He might

easily be waiting now at Mrs. Pitzer's to repeat the thing he had done on his first visit there!

Barry was walking along beside a place where the pavement stood high above the gaping hole left by a recently wrecked building. He had noticed this place often enough since he had come to room at Mrs. Pitzer's. It was a huge hole, once the cellar of an old rookery, now demolished to make room for a new building. For some reason, operations on the new construction were delayed, and the great hole yawned, raw and unprotected, to the sky. On each side of it the walls of tall buildings reared sheer above it for six and ten floors respectively—great, blank, windowless masses of brick. The bottom of the hole was fairly well cleared of debris, but not entirely. There was nothing remarkable about the place; it was a common enough sight for any big city.

But as Barry stood here now, thinking that Canderthorne might be waiting for him at that instant at Mrs. Pitzer's, and sure that Canderthorne would not delay long, in any event, to come there, the boy saw something down in that hole before him that thrilled him with an idea. Near the center of the hole, which had been the basement of an old office building, was the remnant of an old vault, evidently the base—the stump, one might call it—of a series

of vaults that had extended up through the building like a chimney, for service in some suite of offices on each floor. The upper vaults had all been torn away. Work had paused before the heavy basement "stub" had been removed. It stood there, doorless and gaping, like a cave, its top rounded to a mound with debris, but its own structure hardly impaired. It was like a stout old bomb-proof that has stood a seige. But its former purpose was apparent; it had once been used to store valuables in. And the obvious suggestion flashed into Barry's mind. Why not now?

But the former strong-room had no protecting door of steel now. It was just a solid old pile of bricks—maybe lined with steel, but with its interior as defenceless as a house with open doors. Yet Barry held to the idea of a hiding-place here for his treasure. Why not—for a day or two—if he could get down there and out again without being specially noticed? Would someone be sure to see him if he went down there by daylight? Of course; but that would be the very thing that would forestall suspicion. Nobody would imagine that he had any errand in such a hole except a boyish one of idle exploration. Would other boys be likely to explore in the same way? Perhaps. But doubtless

most of the boys of the immediate district had already exhausted all obvious possibilities here, for the hole had been open more than two weeks, at least—perhaps much longer. But would he dare leave the box in such a place? Ha! Would he dare have it in his room? If he could find a nook to hide it in down there in that vault, he would. It was the only thing that offered.

He turned and walked back along the street, considering so earnestly that he even forgot his breakfastless stomach which was beginning to complain. He paused again before the show-window of a store on the corner. Why—the place was a cigar-store and there in the window were boxes of cigars on which he read, half a dozen times repeated, "La Rigora." He knew at once what he would do. He went into the store.

CHAPTER XVIII

DECOYS

"I WANT to get two or three cigar-boxes to match this one," Barry said, holding up his own before the dealer. "La Rigoras. You have them in the window."

A swarthy man behind the counter stared at him an instant, then shook his head. "No. No boxes!" he answered.

"You mean you haven't got any?" asked Barry, with his instinct to persist.

"Huh? Oh, I got plenty, but I don't give 'em away," returned the man.

"I want to buy 'em," Barry told him. "How much?"

The man was interested. Then he grinned. "Three for a quarter?" he queried.

"Sure!" said Barry, and produced a coin he had received with change in the subway.

The man went to the back of the store and

brought forward three good, sound La Rigora boxes, exact duplicates of the one Barry held under his arms. The sight of them suggested exciting things to Barry, as possible ways of protecting his treasure. He took the boxes and paid for them. Then he went out into the street again.

Returning past the excavation where the old vault stood, he paused again and looked it over. It seemed an inviting place for his purpose, in view of the fact that he had no better. He made up his mind to investigate.

At one corner of the big hole a rail was broken out of the fence that guarded pedestrians from dangerous missteps off the pavement. Here a shoulder of the old foundation remained. Perhaps it had been purposely left, for the stones formed steps almost like stairs, from just below the level of the street to the bottom of the old basement.

Barry let himself down through the gap in the fence and descended. It was a moment's task, and no one who passed seemed to notice his act. He reached the level of the vault and started across to it. As he did so, he saw that the old doorway was indeed still lined with steel, bearing the hinges from which the doors had been removed. The threshold rang with hollow metallic sound as he

stepped upon it; and this announced plainly enough that they was empty space under it. Instantly it apprised him that his hunch had probably been a good one; he had doubtless found a place here where his treasure could remain safe for days, if not for weeks.

Inside the vault, he set down his cigar-boxes and turned to look out. No one was in sight at the instant. He watched for a long minute to make sure that no one was spying. No one who came within his field of vision even so much as turned his head that way.

Down on his knees then went Barry and cautiously thrust a hand under the steel threshold. Oh great! Here was space enough, if only some loose old pieces of broken brick and tile were pulled out. He began to pull them out.

But what should he do with this fresh debris? It looked strangely new on the cement floor, which though not free from fragments, was fairly clean. It would never do to leave this stuff here; it would promptly lead any visitor to investigate reasons for the digging that had produced it. Barry thought of his empty boxes. Sure! He intended to fill them with some weighty stuff anyway, to use them as misguiding decoys, in case it became necessary to

throw somebody off the trail of the real treasure. So he pulled one open and quickly filled it with the stuff from under the vault's sill. And as it would not do to have the contents of any box rattle, he scooped up handfuls of sand from the plentiful supply just outside the door, and packed it in around his fragments of brick. The stuff was damp, and when he had pressed down the lid and fastened the tight little nail with a stone, it was virtually noiseless when moved, and quite as heavy as the box that contained the mechanism.

Seeing that this was a useful idea, Barry proceeded to make more room under the threshold of the vault and to fill the other two empty boxes with the stuff he raked out with his hands. Presently he was all prepared for emergencies such as he foresaw; that is, he had three duplicates of the box he wanted to protect. He would find uses for them, if he made no mistake.

He carefully weighed all the boxes in his hands to determine whether substitution for the original would be readily detected. He could not be sure of any differences from balancing them on his palms. He set his duplicates carefully aside then and made ready his hiding place finally for the precious model. When at length it reposed in its place to his entire

satisfaction, well wedged back under the steel threshold, he filled the space in front of it with what was left of the debris, and felt that he had achieved his purpose.

The three remaining boxes were heavy, when he picked them up, but he could carry them without betraying too much evidence of that fact. Reconnoitering outside once more, to be certain that no one was observing him with attention, he became satisfied that we was unwatched. He stepped out, leaving the "hundred thousand dollar box" behind.

Making his way up to the street again, he turned toward Mrs. Pitzer's, lugging his heavy load. The three boxes he carried were at least three times as heavy as the one he had carried about half the night. He was weary of carrying boxes. He let himself in at Mrs. Pitzer's, not knowing who or what might be awaiting him there, but feeling that he was prepared to cope with Canderthorne, at least, should he be on the scene.

But a girl who worked in the house was busy in the front hall as he entered; and so far as she knew no one had been to see him that morning. His suspense fell a little flat at her indifferent tone. Somehow he expected things to happen fast now, and that other people would be wrought up about his affairs.

He went up to his room, still rather expecting that some hostile face might greet him when he should open his door. But his room was as quiet and as private as usual, and all signs that there had been any commotion there yesterday had disappeared. He set his three boxes on his table and thought that he might as well have brought his treasure-box home. Then he made up his mind to go first and get something to eat, and then decide what he ought to do next.

As he stood debating his course, he noticed a sheet of wrinkled paper spread out on his table and held flat by a book that half covered it. It must have been left for his attention. He caught it up. It was the note that had been in the original package with the treasure-box! Unaddressed, unsigned, naming a fabulous value for the contents of the box, and warning against enemies—it was a message packed with significance.

But how came it here? Canderthorne must have dropped it, intentionally or otherwise, and Mrs. Pitzer had found and preserved it. Well, it might not be valuable; but Barry would keep it. He put it into his inner pocket.

He set his boxes away in his tiny closet, then locked his room door and went out. Passing the excavation

where the old vault was, he looked down at that strange old relic, now curiously restored to its original purpose for a brief day before its final destruction. and smiled over his idea. He went on past the cigar-store, which had never interested him before, but which now had associations of its own; and he entered a little restaurant on the avenue, ate a modest breakfast and hurried out again. By this time he had decided what he would do. He would go back first, without the treasure-box, and see if he could find anybody at home by daylight at No. 274.

In order to reach the scene of the beginnings of last night's adventures, he was obliged to retrace his steps past the excavation and Mrs. Pitzer's. He turned that way and began to hurry. If nothing came of this quest, the next thing he must do would be to rush away down town to the offices of Howard & Howard, to save his job. What a wild goose he had been chasing—basing expectation of some substantial gain on hope that seemed slender indeed now. And yet—there was Canderthorne's determination to possess that box, even *after* he knew what was in it! Unless——

A dismaying notion filled his mind. Could Canderthorne have substituted that piece of glittering

clockwork for other valuables that had been in the box at first?

But that suddenly seemed a far cry. Canderthorne wouldn't have tried so hard to recover the box after Barry had purloined it from the library, if it hadn't been—well, still "valuable."

Oh yes, it must be valuable. It must somehow be worth a fortune to somebody!

Barry had reached the excavation now, and he turned instinctively to look down into the hole again. Why! What was that? Someone was moving inside the old vault! The light was dim beyond the threshold, where the sun did not penetrate but somebody was there!

The young fellow stood still and stared. Someone had already penetrated to the place where he had concealed his priceless charge. Who could it be? Was it a chance prowler or someone who had reason to be there? And if the latter, then what could the reason be? Could it be that someone had slily watched him while he buried his treasure, thinking himself unobserved?

But some, at least, of these questions suddenly answered themselves. For just at that instant, out from the dark vault's mouth into the bright sunshine, stepped Mort Binch and Gansy Vleet. One of

Mort's hands was bandaged. But under his arm he carried a cigar-box that he handled as if it were heavy!

CHAPTER XIX

TREASURE LOST!

THE explanation was simple enough. Mort and Gansy had unquestionably been spying for Barry's home-coming. They had seen the queer performances with the cigar-boxes, and witnessed the hiding of the one box of value in the old vault. It had been easy, after that, supposing they had seen from covered vantage-point that Barry had worked on his hands and knees inside the vault's threshold, to dig there after him and find what he had cached there.

But the explanation hardly mattered. Mort Binch had the priceless prize in his hands! And Mort, at any time more than a match for Barry, now, though having a hurt hand, had a stout young ally with him. Even as Barry saw them raise their heads and recognize him, standing there above them, he knew that the odds were hopelessly against him.

The moment Mort and Gansy saw him they began to laugh and hoot with joy. They came to the

wall below him, calling out taunts to him. Barry did not distinguish between the true and the false things they said; it was only too true that they had him at a disastrous disadvantage. Nothing on earth could prevent their getting away with the box!

"Ho, I guess we'll take care of the box everybody's so anxious to get!" sneered Binch, as he reached the pavement near Barry. Then he laughed gleefully. "Don't you wish you knew how we caught you buryin' the thing?"

"I suppose you were watching for me to come home," said Barry, who, though in despair, would not let Binch know it yet. Something might occur to him—some idea he could use to beat them. Maybe he could even make them think the box was not valuable, and so throw them off their guard and gain an opportunity.

But Gansy Vleet was eager to tell how he and Mort had come upon Barry's secret. "We laid for you! We seen all you done!" he explained.

Gansy was not a master of English. But he was much amused at the trick that had been pulled.

"Where'd yuh think we was when you was diggin' down there in the vault?" he demanded.

Barry shook his head. Surely it did not matter! And yet he was curious.

"We was in that box!" announced Gansy, triumphantly pointing to a big wooden tool-box on the curb of the street, such as is used by workers on buildings for the overnight protection of their personal possessions while they are on the job. Clearly this particular tool-box had been left empty and unlocked, while there was delay on this job which did not promise to be long enough to pay for hauling the box away. With its slanting cover toward the street, easily raised by the boys who had watched their chance, and with its big cracks between boards on the back side which faced the excavation, it had made an ideal cover for the spies, never even noticed by the unsuspecting Barry!

Simple enough! But, oh, what a disaster!

Still Barry Dare watched Mort Binch's eyes, as a clever boxer watches an opponent's. What did Mort Binch propose to do?

Mort grinned viciously. "Wouldn't you like to be in on the *re*ward we're goin' to get!" he taunted Barry.

Barry, determined to be game, grinned back contemptuously. "*Re*ward!" he repeated, imitating Mort's emphasis. "What do you think you've *got* in that box?"

"I guess it don't make no difference what's in it."

reported Binch. "Cheswick said he'd give us the *re*ward to get it for him!"

Cheswick! Evidently, then, here was the other party to this strange affair whose name had been mentioned in the same note that had contained the warning against Canderthorne. Cheswick! How had Binch and Gansy gotten into touch with him?

But the fact that a reward was offered for the return of box confirmed Barry's assurance of its high value; and the fact that Mort and Gansy knew it was valuable, and now had it safely in their possession again made his, Barry's share in the affair seem like that of an "also ran." But Barry set his teeth. A game is never played till the last man is out. The fortunes of this particular game had ballanced strangely, and teetered to and fro. Maybe more changes would take place in the luck!

"That box doesn't belong to you!" Barry hazzarded to Binch.

"Well, it don't belong to you, neither!" sneered Mort.

"It doesn't belong to Cheswick, either," Barry added. "You'd better not give it to him."

"We should worry!" crowed Gansy Vleet. "He's the guy says he'll pay for it!"

"The real owners will make trouble for you."

"How?"

"For stealing it."

"How about *you*? You stole it!

"I did not. I couldn't deliver it because nobody was home. And I only tried to keep it for the owner."

"Yah! Fine! Mamma's little man!" snorted Mort, at which Gansy shouted with joy.

"Well, they're lookin' fer you all right," went on Mort. "You're the guy that'll get pinched. Ganse an' me, we'll get the *re*ward, see? An' when we do, I'll come back an' do you up for this!" Binch held up his bandaged hand.

A daring thought leaped into Barry's mind. He acted on it instantly. Leaping forward almost at the second that Mort raised his hurt hand, he kicked violently at the box which Mort held insecurely under the other elbow. It was a complete surprise to Binch and if Barry's toe had reached the box—or the arm that held it—the advantage in the situation might have shifted right then. But Barry's ankle turned under him; he had tried too hard to drive a tremendous kick home!

His leg doubled under him and he crashed to the pavement. And before he could recover, mean young

Gansy Vleet kicked him squarely in the solar plexus! And all the wind, and all the fight, and nearly all the consciousness, went out of Barry Dare! And in his daze he was only certain that Mort Binch and Gansy Vleet ran away with the box for which he had tried. He heard their harsh laughs and their running feet. And then, sick, gasping for breath that would not come back, his body doubled itself up involuntarily, like a virtually wounded thing! He wondered if he were going to die!

CHAPTER XX

A GLIMPSE INTO MYSTERY

WHEN he grew able to raise himself and the first blessed rush of breath came back to his lungs, Barry was glad enough to accept the help of a man who had seen him writhing on the walk and had come to aid him. When he was on his feet again and able to breathe almost normally, despite the pain left behind by Gansy Vleet's kick, he saw that his helper was a somewhat bent old man, with white hair, but with fine brown eyes that were large and luminous.

"Those tough boys do you up?" he inquired of Barry solicitously.

"Yes," admitted Barry. He did not make the excuses he might have made—"They were two to one!" "I slipped!" That was not Barry Dare's kind.

"What did they do it for?"

"Oh—they took something away from me."

"They did?" The kindly old man regarded him sympathetically. "Was it valuable?"

"Supposed to be," admitted Barry.

"Don't you know?"

"No—it didn't belong to me."

"Not—belong to you?"

"It was given to me to deliver," Barry reiterated his worn explanation. "I couldn't find anybody home, and then—well, it's a long story."

He was feeling pretty sick. The old man noticed it.

"They hurt you, didn't they?"

Barry nodded and gulped, trying to swallow his pain.

"Well, say! You look pretty white! You come on over home with me. I live right near here!"

"So do I," answered Barry. "I can—get home."

"Well, but I'm only a little ways," insisted the old man, slipping a hand under Barry's arm, as if he expected the boy to faint. "I'm right across the block here." He pointed. "Number 274!"

Barry straightened as if he had been rowelled with a spur. No. 274! Great lad! Why, who was this old man?

The blood leaped in Barry and he forgot his pain. "Do you mean—do you mean that you live at No. 274?" He pointed at the place, which was visible diagonally across the corners of the crossing streets.

"Why, yes, I do," returned the old man, mildly, his fine brown eyes, so full of intelligence, beaming. "Why?"

"Why!" gasped Barry. "Why, because it was ——What's your name?"

"Angus Baylor, returned the other simply. He was the soul of candor.

"And you live at 274? Are you sure?"

"Well!" The old man laughed gently. "Naturally, I am sure."

Barry caught him by the arms. "Do you live in the hidden house—in behind the buldings?"

"Why—if you call it that—yes. I've lived there all my life. The buildings grew up around the house."

"Anybody else live there?" demanded Barry insatiably.

"Not now. Not a soul. I'm an old——"

"Then it's *you!*" cried Barry incoherently. "You're the one! You're him! He's—what did you say your name is?"

The old man sobered somewhat. "Say, are you sure you feel all right in your head?" he inquired, with a touch of quizzing.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Barry. "But listen! It was *you* I was to deliver that box to, last night, at 274!

But nobody was at home, except a fellow who—well, he wasn't you!" He surveyed the old man's fragile, somewhat bent figure. It bore no resemblance to the lithe, catlike form he had seen in the mysterious court around the hidden house last night.

"Heh?" inquired Angus Baylor. "You mean that was what the boys took away from you just now? Something you had for me?"

Barry nodded, unable to curb his racing thoughts long enough to speak.

"Well, now, who sent you?" asked the old man.

"A young fellow with red eye-brows," answered Barry. "He——"

But the old man had started into excitement in turn. "What?" he gasped. "Did he—did he tell you his name?"

"His name? No! He just gave me a box to deliver at 274. Said he'd give me a dollar—or at least——. Any way, I——." He stopped again. His thoughts were far ahead of his words, and he lost the thread of what he was saying.

But Angus Baylor was almost as much excited as he. "What was the box like?" he queried eagerly, his old face flushing and his luminous eyes a-glitter. "What was in it?"

"It was a cigar-box," Barry told him. "I didn't

know till this morning what was in it—but it was somethng like clock-work—packed in fine white saw-dust!"

"My lock!" cried the old man.

"Your what?"

"My lock—my time-lock! It's an invention that will revolutionize the practice of——"

"An invention?' interrupted Barry. "Then it *is* worth a hundred thousand dollars!"

"Who said so?"

"A note was in the package with the box. I opened it to find out who it belonged to. "It said, 'There's a hundred thousand dollars in this,' or something like that. Here! Wait! I've got it here!"

He thrust his hand into his inner pocket and brought out the wrinkled paper. The old man seized it eagerly. He read it several times. Then he looked up.

"You say the man who gave you this had red hair?" he asked.

"Red eye-brows," corrected Barry. "I couldn't see his hair under his hat."

"He is my son," said old Angus Baylor, and his voice trembled a little. "A year ago he ran away from me, taking my invention with him. He was

a wild-boy—but he has a heart in him after all. He —brought the model back!"

"The model?"

"Yes; the clock-work you saw is the model, built to scale, of the time-lock itself."

"But—why is it so valuable? I should think you could build another for a lot less than a hundred thous——"

"Oh, yes! But it's the idea that's valuable! That's what the note meant. There's a hundred thousand dollars in this idea! But if this model falls into unscrupulous hands, the idea will be lost, for it isn't patented yet."

"Not patented?"

"No—I didn't have the money."

"But your son—why didn't he bring you back the model himself? Why did he send me?"

"You only chanced to be the convenient messenger, I guess. But Vernon didn't dare come-back—because there's a charge against him of attempt to kill Cheswick! And even if the law didn't get him, Cheswick and his gang would try!"

"And now, Cheswick will get the time-lock model!" cried Barry. "Those boys said he promised them a reward!"

"Well," said Angus Baylor calmly, "I don't care

half so much about that as I do that my boy brought it back to me! He cares—and he wants to be square with his old dad! He found out how valuable the device is—and he brought it back!"

"But—don't you *want* it?" cried Barry wildly.

"Of course," returned Baylor. "I'd give a—ten thousand dollar interest in it to get it back! But—if Cheswick has——"

"Oh!" moaned Barry. "Then it's all my fault!"

CHAPTER XXI

TWO CAN PLAY TRICKS!

"YOUR fault? Why?" old Angus Baylor asked.

"Because I should have taken care of it! But I'll——"

Barry stopped short with a new thought. "Do you suppose Cheswick would give ten thousand for it?"

"What? Why, yes—if he had to. He knows it's worth far more than that!"

"But I mean—as a reward to those boys," explained Barry.

"Hardly!" smiled the old man.

"But—you *would!*"

"Give them ten thou——"

"Yes! I mean you'd give them more than Cheswick would!"

"I'd give them more than he'd be likely to."

Barry tried to think what to do. The thing that was plain enough to him now was that he had done

a wildly foolish thing in trying to keep the Baylor model in his own hands. It had been that that had made all the trouble! Why had he done it? Of course it had been because he had been afraid of losing the profit there might be in it for himself! And now, he had not only probably lost that profit to Mort Binch, but he had lost the fortune that belonged to this kind and good old man! And the very fact that Baylor cared more for the evidence that his son cared for him than he did for the fortune was an added reason why Barry could not endure to have him lose it!

"I don't know what to do!" he said. "But I'm going to try to think. If I could only reach those boys before they get to Cheswick——" He paused. "What is Cheswick like?" he asked.

"Cheswick?" repeated old Baylor. "He's a small man, but very wiry and strong. "He's as agile as a cat—a regular—a regular human panther!"

"Oh, I saw him! It was him I—— He must have been——"

Barry stopped his stumbling speech by sheer effort of will. Then he told Angus Baylor of the man he had seen in the courtyard back of Door 274, last night—the man who had hovered in the house-door like a reflection in the glass, and who had afterward

searched the court with an electric torch before he had gone away.

"It must have been Cheswick," Baylor said. "But I don't understand how he came to be in my house. And yet—I was tricked away from home last night. I had a 'phone message that said I'd get news of my son if I'd go to the Mercy Hospital. Of course I went. And they knew nothing about it!"

"Cheswick probably sent the message! He must have learned somehow that your son—Vernon—was bringing back the model! It was his scheme——"

"But why didn't Cheswick take it away from you?" asked Baylor.

"I can't guess why he didn't try—the way Canderthorne did!" Barry told swiftly then of his adventure with Canderthorne. Angus Baylor listened in amazement.

"Well!" he said at the end. And then, "Well, you deserve a reward!"

"But it's all worthless—if we lose now!" cried Barry despairingly. Then the spirit rose in him again—that indomitable bull-dog determination not to give up. "I'm not going to quit—yet!" he said, through set teeth.

Angus Baylor's eyes lighted. "Probably," he said

slowly, "those boys will take that box to Cheswick's office."

"Oh! Where is it?" cried Barry.

"In the Fortunatus Building, away down town."

"Then——" Barry uttered the single word; then his mind saw a whole vista of plans. "You go home and wait!" he said. "I'm going to try to beat Mort Binch and Gansy Vleet. If they're going to Cheswick's office, they're not there yet! And two can play at tricks!"

He turned and started for Mrs. Pitzer's on the run, his bruises making him limp for a step or two, but soon forgoten. He raced up the steps and into the house. As he opened the door he had an impression that someone was in the parlor at his right. Voices came out—voices that seemed to pause as soon as his steps were heard. But he was intent on his purpose and paid little heed. He ran up stairs and to the telephone. Finding a number in the worn old book, he put in his call. Presently he had the response he hoped for.

"Hello!" he said carefully. "Is this Mr. Cheswick's office?"

"Yes," came back the reply. "Ashley Cheswick, attorney at law."

"Well," said Barry, "is Mr. Cheswick in?"

"No," returned the answer; "he won't be in till after lunch."

Barry's heart sank. This might mean that Mort and Gansy were to meet Ashley Cheswick somewhere else. Yet how could that have been arranged? Mort and Gansy could not have foreseen with any certainty when they might secure the model-box from Barry—or whether they would get it at all! It must be that they would expect to find Cheswick *after* they had secured the box. But *they* might have telephoned, too—while Barry had lingered talking with Angus Baylor! Cheswick might have left his office to meet them!

"Hello!" said the voice at the other end of the wire, impatiently.

"Oh!" returned Barry. "Well—what time did Mr. Cheswick go out?"

"He hasn't been in," was the answer. "He won't be in till after lunch."

"Oh, you mean he hasn't been down this morning?"

"Not yet. Who is this?"

Barry hung up quickly. Well, then! Mort Binch and Gansy Vleet might not get to Cheswick till—— But he heard a step in the hallway behind him. He turned and found Mrs. Pitzer there.

"Well, Barry!" she exclaimed. "How we have looked and waited for you! Who were you telephoning to?"

"A man," returned Barry. "I——"

"I mean, I thought I heard you say the name Cheswick. Mr. Cheswick is down stairs now—waiting to see you."

CHAPTER XXII

THE "HUMAN PANTHER"

CHESWICK! The "human panther!" Down stairs now—waiting for Barry!

Fear rushed up again into Barry's heart and brain! Panic! The human panther! Melodramatic title—but how much it might mean! But the instant Barry knew that he was frightened, the thing that Errald Wyant had said came back to him.

"Fear is really a man's only enemy!" had been his idea, if not his exact words. "Because it robs him of his intelligence!"

Barry set his teeth. "I won't be scared!" he resolved silently. "And I won't quit! Maybe here's my chance!"

"Do you mean—that Mr. Cheswick wants—to see me?" he asked Mrs. Pitzer lamely.

"Yes—he's asking for you."

Then the chances were certanly good that Mort and Gansy had not yet surrendered the model of

Angus Baylor's time-lock to Cheswick. Otherwise, why should Cheswick care anything about Barry Dare?

"Does he know—I'm here?" he asked the landlady.

"Yes—I told him it was you."

Barry thought fast again. "All right," he said after an instant. "Tell him I'll come down in a minute."

He turned to his room, down the hall. Inside, he softly locked the door. Now for a clever ruse, if ever he conceived one! Could he give Ashley Cheswick one of those boxes of broken brick and sand that stood now in his closet in lieu of the model box, and so get him away while he, Barry, might have a chance to find and deal with Binch and Vleet? His heart pounded with excitment! He must be cool! If he were not, he would betray anything he tried to do, by his mere agitation!

He put his hands over his eyes and leaned against the wall. "I won't be scared!" he whispered. "I won't be scared! Fear is the only enemy! I won't be scared!"

Then he turned to his closet and brought out the three boxes he had hidden there. Which would be the best to give to Ashley Cheswick? Which weighed

the nearest to the exact weight of the model-box? More important, which cover would be hardest to open quickly? He tried first one, then another. All seemed fast. But why not make doubly sure? He could take the nails out of two of the covers and put them into the third. That would make it almost impossible to open that third box with the fingers —even of a human panther! Even Cheswick would need a tool!

The idea seemed sound. Barry chose the box which seemed to show the most handling as the one he would give to Ashley Cheswick. Then with his knife he began to pry open one of the others. It came. He removed the thin wire nail from its cover, and quickly, carefully, drove it into the cover of the first, using a door-stop weight that was in the room for a hammer. Then he pried at the third box. Its nail came up with the first effort, and when he pushed the cover down, the nail stood up so that he could slip the blade of his knife under it and pull it out. He drove this nail also into the box he intended to give to Ashley Cheswick.

When he had ended, the one box was well nailed. It would resist ordinary "parlor" efforts to open it. Cheswick might accept it without suspicion. Why should he suspect, indeed, any more than Cander-

thorne had suspected when he had seized the only box he knew anything about, here in this room last night? Barry felt himself growing calmer.

But he must put the other two boxes out of sight. He set the carefully nailed decoy on the table and started to pick up one of the others. The loose cover came open under his hand. His heart stopped beating! There under his hands lay the glittering clockwork model of Angus Baylor's time-lock!

It was unbelievable! But it was true! Here was the model, just as Errald Wyant had restored it to its box in the white plains garage. Here was the model—for which Ashley Cheswick was now waiting down stairs! Here was the model Barry had supposed Mort Binch and Gansy Vleet had taken away from him to carry to Cheswick himself!

How came that model here? There could be but one explanation. Barry himself, after preparing his three decoys, must have buried the wrong box under the steel threshold of the old vault! When Mort and Gansy, digging up the box he had buried, must have run off with a box of broken brick and sand! Great guns! If Barry had known that, what a lot of suffering he would have been spared! And all the time, he had the model itself—the precious model!—in his own hands!

But what now? Ashley Cheswick *was* waiting down stairs! Oh, great scaruzalem! Had Mort Binch and Gansy Vleet found him already, and delivered to him a box of brick and sand? Was that why he was here? Had he been tricked once by a decoy, quite without Barry's knowing it? And was he here now, knowing that the genuine box must be here still?"

At any rate, Barry must try his game. And he must move quickly; otherwise Ashley Cheswick would be up here at his door, as Canderthorne was last night. What should he do with the real box while he tried to pass the counterfeit on Cheswick? He looked at the marble-topped table. Why not use this now? It had failed as a hiding-place from Canderthorne; but it would not be likely to be upset twice. He stooped and put the model-box carefully up on the bar under the marble, as he had done before. Then he rose, slipped the second box of sand under his bed, and opened his door. He was about to take his triply nailed decoy down to Cheswick when a question suddenly occurred to him. How was he supposed to know what Cheswick had come for?

The answer to that question was simple. He was

not supposed to know! Cheswick would not expect him to know.

Barry turned and set the decoy on his table. Then he went out and walked slowly down stairs. At the parlor door he paused; and the instant he saw Ashley Cheswick, he knew he was the man who had been at No. 274 last night!

"Oh!" the visitor said, standing up the moment he saw Barry. "You're Barry Dare, are you? You must be the boy who tried to deliver a box to me last night at Number 274."

Here was something Barry had not anticipated. But he asked the natural frank question.

"Why? Do you live there?

"Why, yes," returned Ashley Cheswick.

"You weren't at home last night then?" asked Barry, emboldened by the fact that the man was lying to him.

"No. No, I was out. Some—ah—some boys told me you were there."

"Boys!"

"Yes. Binch, is it? A friend of yours?"

Ashley Cheswick had little gimlet eyes. They were boring into Barry steadily. Barry could almost feel the holes that they were drilling. But he knew that he had the better of this situation, for even this

man's clever lies wouldn't get far against the simple truth, as Barry knew it.

"Then you're the one the box was intended for?" Barry asked with assumed innocence.

"Of course. I was expecting it," said Cheswick. "Where is it "

"But some other people have claimed it," objected Barry.

"Who?" asked Cheswick, startled.

"Well—a man named Canderthorne," said Barry smoothly.

"What?" cried the other. "You didn't give it to him!"

"No," returned Barry drily. He was tempted to add that Canderthorne had taken it—and let Cheswick draw his own mistaken inference that Canderthorne still had it. But Barry knew that lies are weak, no matter how cleverly they may seem.

"Then you still have it?" cried Cheswick.

"Is it so valuable?"

"Well—not tremendously."

"Then why did Canderthorne try so hard to get it?"

"Did he?"

"And why did you say you'd—give Binch a reward for it?"

Cheswick's eyes narrowed. "Did—Binch get it?"

"No. But do I get a reward for it if I get it?"

"Certainly. I'll pay you what I would pay anybody."

"How much?"

"Ten dollars was what I promised Binch."

"Then it can't be worth much—to you," said Barry. "But wait." He turned and went back up stairs. His hand trembled as he took his decoy from the table in his room and carried it down stairs again.

"Oh!" exclaimed Cheswick, with obvious relief, the moment he set his eyes on the box. "Then you *have* got it!"

He had a ten-dollar bill in his hand now. He offered it to Barry and reached simultaneously for the box. But Barry held back.

"If this belongs to you," he said, "I don't want a reward for it. I only wanted to know what you promised Binch."

"Take it!" urged Cheswick.

Barry shook his head. But he held out his decoy for Cheswick to take. And Cheswick took it, as a bass snaps at bait. Then he tossed his ten-dollar bill on the parlor table. "That's for you anyway,"

he said. He caught up his hat. "If you see Binch," he added, "tell him I got what I want!"

He hurried toward the door. Barry followed quietly. How far would he go before he would discover his ludicrous error? Would the trick give Barry time to get away with the Baylor model and carry it over to the old man who really owned it?

The young fellow turned as soon as the man Cheswick was gone. "That ten dollars is yours, Mrs. Pitzer," he said, "since Mr. Cheswick is throwing it away. I don't want it for anything I've done for him—and this has made you a lot of worry."

Then he ran up stairs. Carefully examining the two remaining boxes in his room, to be sure that he had the right one this time, he put the original box, containing the precious model into his small suit-case. Then he wrapped the last of the sand-boxes in a newspaper, tied it up with stout cord and tucked it under his arm He might yet have to use it! Seizing his hat, he ran once more down the stairs.

He opened the door cautiously. Ashley Cheswick had disappeared. Quickly Barry ran out and down the steps. At the curb he paused a moment, waiting for a chance to run through the traffic. He was

about to start when a voice close to his elbow stopped him.

"Hey, you—Dare!"

It was Mort Binch—back again! And of course Gansy Vleet was with him. And Binch at once pushed a cigar-box labeled La Rigora at Barry.

"Say! What'd you bury a box of sand for, huh? "What did you do with the real box, what?"

"There it is under his arm now!" shouted Gansy Vleet, and rushed upon Barry.

Amazed, but ready to shout with laughter at this sudden turn, Barry knew that his proper cue was to fight for the paper-wrapped package until they should get it away from him. He dropped the suit-case, therefore, in which reposed the real prize, and struggled desperately—apparently—to prevent Gansy Vleet from getting the package he was after.

The fight very quickly became convincing enough for anybody. It was so convincing that it was suddenly interrupted.

"Here! I'll take charge of that!" cried a voice above Barry's head, as he and Gansy Vleet clinched. And next instant a man's hands had reached between them and wrenched the paper-wrapped package from their grasp.

Both Binch and Gansy set up yells of protest. And

the two of them rushed at the man who backed away with the package. And when Barry saw that individual's face, it seemed too funny to be true! It was Reginald Canderthorne!

Barry laughed in his throat. But he grabbed his suit-case, with the Baylor model safely inside it, and ran for No. 274!

But he was scarcely across the street, and his foot was on the curb, when he crashed into a man who confronted him. Dazed, he staggered dizzily; and then looked up into the eyes of—"the human panther!"

CHAPTER XXIII

PURSUIT!

It seemed to Barry as if Fate were gathering all its blows to rain upon him at once. But—a game's never played till the gamest man's out! And Barry was getting used to thinking fast. He saw instantly that Cheswick was slow to recognize him. It gave him an instant's advantage. And back he sprang into the street.

Of course, the moment he started to run, Cheswick became attentive, and recognized him. Then he gave chase. Oh, why hadn't Barry learned to control that panic-feeling that made him do unintelligent things! If he hadn't started to run, Cheswick wouldn't have looked at him twice!

It was too late to consider that now, however. He could only run—and "the panther" was after him! But his alert wits saw openings where most fellows would not have seen them. A street-car had stopped at the corner. Its rear doors were open

and a heavy woman was climbing aboard. The conductor was waiting impatiently for her with his hand on the lever to close the doors. Barry saw that he could make that car, if he continued his rush. He rushed. He swung himself up and inside the car, just as the conductor swung his lever. The closing doors hit the suit-case. But Barry was in—and Ashley Cheswick was a scant ten feet behind him, but just too late! The car started.

But "the panther" was not to be easily balked. He made a running leap, and caught hold of the sill of the half-open window at the rear of the car, and found some footing on the folded fender below. He was within three feet of Barry, and his dark face was black with menace. He grabbed wildly through the opening above the window-bars at Barry.

Barry fell over the step up from the vestibule to the level of the car floor, as he scrambled out of reach. But he kept his head. He had the advantage again.

"Thief!" he cried, pointing at Cheswick.

The conductor caught up an iron bar from somewhere. Without a question, he took the boy's part against the man.

"Get off there!" he yelled, and raised the bar as if to strike.

Ashley Cheswick was quick to see that the odds were against him. But, "There's the thief!" he cried, pointing in at Barry. "That's my suit-case he's got!"

The car was half full of people. All were staring. As Barry ran past them, several started to their feet. No one understood just what was happening, however, and they looked past Barry to see and hear what was going on between the conductor and Cheswick. Barry gained the front end.

"Fight!" he said to the motor-man, who looked at him inquiringly. "Maybe you'd better help."

The car was already nearing the corner of the short block. The motor-man applied the brakes. Hearing shouting continued at the rear, he seized his controller and turned to run back through the car.

Barry caught the lever that opened the front door. It took him a scant five seconds to swing it and leap into the street again, He looked back as he did so, and saw Ashley Cheswick just climbing up into the rear end. The man did not see Barry; he was too busy looking for him inside the car. Barry ran around a corner news-stand, and under its cover

dropped to a quiet pace. He walked calmly into a busy corner drug-store.

Attracting no attention now, he made his way to the rear, stepped into a telephone booth, fortunately vacant, and shut the door. He was perspiring, but he was surprised to feel now that he was very little afraid. Somewhat winded he was; but he had outwitted and out-played the "human panther" himself, and he began to belive that "grit and wit" do count. Somehow they went together!

He meant now to call up Errald Wyant and ask his help. But no telephone book was in the booth! There it was, outside, on a desk! Barry dared not step out and use it there; Cheswick would be sure to see him at a single glance into the store. What should he do? He knew.

He took down the receiver and dropped a nickel into the 'phone.

"Information, please," he asked the operator when she responded. And in less than a whole minute he had got the New Century club on the wire and was asking for Mr. Wyant. Before another minute had passed, Wyant's big voice was answering.

"This is Errald Wyant."

"Oh, Mr. Wyant!" cried Barry. "I've got to have somebody to help me! I guess everybody's

trying to get the—the——" He stopped. How would Errald Wyant understand all this?

"Who's talking?" asked Wyant.

"Barry Dare!" answered Barry. "I'm in trouble! Will you help me?"

"I will that! Where are you?"

"Well, I'm—I live at——" Barry gave Mrs. Pitzer's number. "But I'm not there!" he added, and heard Mr. Wyant laugh briefly.

"I want to come where you are—and bring something for you to take care of for me," he begged.

"Right-o! I'll be here at the club all morning. I knew you and I should meet again!" He told Barry where the club was; it was in Fortieth Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Barry hung up. He would go to Errald Wyant if he could get there. He stood still in the booth, to think. If Ashley Cheswick were trying to trace him, he would probably be describing him as a young fellow in a gray hat, carrying a brown suit-case. Better get rid of the suit-case—and perhaps of the hat, too! He opened the case on the floor of the booth, and took out the model-box. He dropped his hat into the grip and stood up. Then it occurred to him that he could rid himself of the model-box.

He opened it and took the model itself out. In the suit-case was a linen bag for toilet articles which his mother had given him for traveling, but which he kept in the suit-case now that his things were spread out on his bedroom dresser. He slipped the model into his bag and tucked it under his coat. Now what should he do with the box? Could he leave one more decoy behind

He peered out of the glass in the door of the booth. So far as he could tell, there was no unusual movement in the store to indicate a search for him. He stepped out of the booth.

A police officer was not four feet from him, just peering into booth after booth of the line of which Barry's was one. He was inspecting the occupants! He looked up at Barry!

Barry brushed his hands up carelessly through his uncovered hair. Many high school fellows wore no hats now-a-days; the officer would think his hatlessness natural. But instead of trying to pass the man with an assumption of innocence, he turned to him with worried air.

"Will you tell me how to get to the New Century Club?" he asked, brashly.

The policeman might not have been searching

for a young fellow with a suit-case and a gray hat. But if he were, he had not found one. He answered Barry's question quietly, giving him the same directions Errald Wyant had given him. And Barry went on out the side door of the place into the street.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DEATH TRAP

THE best way to get to the New Century Club would be to go back to the Sixth Avenue L. He could get a train at the station almost opposite Mrs. Pitzer's house. If he could once get this troublesome model out of his hands and into safe-keeping, he would be more thankful than he had ever been in his life. He started back toward Sixth Avenue, along the quieter street that paralled the one he had so recently left in haste.

Adventure-box, indeed! But he had dropped the box now; would the adventure stop? Or was it the model itself that carried trouble wherever it went? Oh, nonsense! Of course, no such thing was true; a little bunch of springs and wheels couldn't have anything to do with things that happened to the people who handled them! It was the unscruplous greed of the men who knew the model's value that made all the trouble. This seemed true

enough; but Barry wondered suddenly why he had himself become involved in these troubles. There must be something in that idea that the model was unlucky—a hoodoo! Why, Barry had not even been able to let go of it! Why not?

He hurried. There was a new reason for being startled in this idea that he could not let go of that fateful thing! He must get rid of it! Under his coat, the heavy little machine tugged at his side with every step. Its sharp corners dug into him through his shirt. He remembered suddenly that story of the Spartan boy who let the fox under his garment gnaw into his breast while he faced his enemies with a smile. Gee! Here was a sort of fox gnawing at Barry Dare!

Of course, he thought of trying to go back to No. 274 and deliver the model to Angus Baylor. But he was sure that Ashley Cheswick would rush back to forestall this very thing as soon as he realized that he had lost Barry's trail. No; Errald Wyant was the one to go to.

It was only a short distance back to the L station. Barry turned the corner of the Avenue and hurried toward the stairs. But clearly, adventure was still on his trail. He heard a sudden clatter of feet on the pavement, and turned to see his two enemies,

Binch and Gansy Vleet, close upon him! Whether they had foreseen that he would come back, or whether they had just been loafing around the L station corner, as their kind is apt to do, Barry did not know. But it did not matter—here they were!

And away went Barry once more, avoiding the L station now, of course, as it could only prove a blind alley since they had seen him. He ran across the street and toward Mrs. Pitzer's without knowing just why. It wouldn't do him any good to go home, for even if he could shut out Mort and Gansy, they could bring Cheswick there. What should he do? He did not seem to have an idea; he could only run. And oh, how he hated to run—away from those two!

But he had not conceived of any good plan for dodging his enemies, when he found himself running alongside the open excavation where the old vault was. He looked down at the stout old relic of a strong room, with a sense that somehow it might yet help him, if he could only get the right inspiration. But—how could it?

He looked back. He had outrun Mort and Gansy a little. They had been delayed by a truck that Barry had dodged. For a second Barry paused and looked down into the big hole below him. No use!

He turned to run on. He came abruptly upon a man in workman's garb, who seemed to be stretchng a rope across the pavement to prevent people's passing.

As Barry ran toward him the man warned him back.

Barry could not stop to inquire why. He could only turn and run back the other way, and so lose all the advantage he had gained over Mort and Gansy. They would catch him now! He was in for another beating at least! Could he hope to conceal the fact that he had that heavy model under his coat? Certainly, with it there, he could not even put up a decent self-defence.

His heart began to fail him. and the choking sensation of despair filled his throat. But suddenly he set his teeth. "I won't quit!" he whispered.

Binch and Gansy reached the pavement ahead of him. He was cut off from that way now. The traffic in the street beside him was so heavy and so swift at the moment that there was no chance to dodge through; it would be almost certain death or injury to try it. Only one way was open, and that seemed a silly one to take. Yet—"I won't quit!" came the words like a whip across his flagging courage. They had begun to be a sort of standard for him to measure up to. A high, hard standard,

but one which had the power to fetch the last ounce of his strength into his purpose, the last shred of his spirit into his determination.

"I won't quit!" he gasped. And he seized the guard-rail along the side of the pavement, which was all of fifteen feet above the bottom of the gaping hole down there, and vaulted over it as if it were a simple fence on a level.

Down, down he went. Boy, this was a jump! Would he be hurt?

But he struck the ground with his lithe young legs under him. It was a jar, and he fell to his knees with the force of it. And one sharp metal corner of Baylor's model dug viciously into his ribs. He felt it cut! But the thing he realized most clearly was that he had put a moment's barrier between himself and his pursuers. He was pretty sure that neither Mort nor Gansy would dare that jump!

He stumbled to his feet, hunching his concealed burden higher under his arm, and turning to look back for a second at the pavement above. What he saw was that the two fellows who were hot on his trail had turned at once to run to the corner where the broken old wall furnished crude stairs for descent.

Why in the world had he jumped down here? He

had only postponed the fight that would inevitably be forced upon him. Well, he would see!

He turned and ran to the vault door. If he set himself in the doorway there, with a few bricks for amunition, perhaps he could stand Mort and Gansy off. At least, they could not get behind him! It was somethng he could try—the only thing he could think of to try!

In a moment he had reached the door and entered. Catching up a couple of bricks, he turned and looked back. Mort and Gansy were just beginning to climb down the broken wall. Above, in the street, the man who had barred Barry's progress with the rope was now stretching it all along the curb, fastening it to the tool-box there, and carrying it on. He was enclosing the whole walk along the side of the excavation! He was warning every passer-by to keep outside the rope! Why—was there danger here? Was there a *new* danger?

Barry stared. The man with the rope was working with his back to the excavation apparently; he had given no heed to the running boys, or to where they had gone! Now he was pausing to explain something to an inquiring man who stood outside the curb. He pointed up to the towering side of the higher building which overshadowed the

hole. Something was wrong there! Barry looked up.

What he had expected to see he never could tell afterwards. But what he did see was a high wall in which was a gaping crack he had never seen there before! And even as he looked up at it, he saw crumbling bits of brick slide down out of it, and dust sift away on the breeze like spray from a waterfall!

He forgot Mort Binch and Gansy Vleet, for an instant, as he grasped what was happening here. The high wall of that building at which he stared was settling, sagging, cracking! It had been undermined; it was going to fall!

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE SHADOW!

NEVER in all Barry Dare's life had such a feeling come over him. He needed no expert knowledge to tell him that Death itself was looming up there above him—that it would be a matter of seconds, perhaps, before the wall would fall! And when it did fall it would bury him, Barry Dare, deep under its awful, crushing mass!

For one frightful moment, Barry Dare stood still! Then he looked down to the level of the excavation floor, and saw Mort Binch and Gansy Vleet running toward him. In complete ignorance of the fearful danger into which all three had rushed, these enemies of his were only intent on overtaking him.

Barry stepped outside the vault door and held up both hands. It was like surrender! Then he pointed up at the crumbilng wall.

"The wall's going to fall!" he shouted.

But Mort Binch was upon him. Taking Barry's

desperate warning as a mere subterfuge, he swung his left fist and crashed it into Barry's undefended face!

The blow, with Mort's rushing weight behind it, sent Barry reeling backward into the vault. He nearly fell. He had no chance to cry out another warning. Gansy rushed in, as Binch gathered himself after his first blow. Barry struck out desperately. He had almost forgotten that he still held the bricks in his hands. But one of them came abruptly into contact with Gansy Vleet's head!

Down went Gansy to the cement floor of the vault. Binch, in the doorway, saw what had occurred, and seemed to hesitate. But as he stood there in a moment Barry Dare would never forget, a sound like deep rumbling thunder arose outside!

The wall! It was falling *now!*

To Barry's ears came a mixture of sounds for a brief second or two. He heard the regular crash and rattle of traffic on the avenue, the din of passing trains, the shouts of men, the scream of a woman, all in an awful, breathless instant, during which the giant rumble of the breaking wall seemed to pause. And then suddenly Mort Binch wilted there on the threshold of the vault and pitched forward! Daylight outside wavered! An earthquake

seemed to seize the ground under Barry Dare's feet! And pandemonium was in the air!

Then there was a blast of air, and a rush of blinding, choking dust that struck his face and body like hail! It flung him backward against the inner wall of the vault and seemed to pin him there. And the thunder of sounds suddenly died, and darkness and stillness settled down, as if his very senses of sight and hearing had been destroyed!

Barry could not credit his own groping consciousness. It was too horrible to be possible! Buried alive! Buried under tons—hundreds of tons!—of bricks and mortar and stone! By the veriest chance, it seemed, they were saved from instant annihiliation by the old vault's staunch roof—but with an even more terrible fate upon them!

The weakness of the undermined wall and the probability of its falling must have been discovered only that morning. The man with the rope had been sent there to warn people out of danger—even to keep them away from the very pavement. But nobody could have realized that the catastrophe was imminent!

And now—now it had occurred! And three boys were entombed in a hole that was like a deep chamber in a mine, where men are sometimes caught by falls

of rock. Only it was always known to people above ground when men were caught in a mine! Did anyone up there in the street know that three boys were caught down here?

Barry's mind pictured the scene on the avenue. People would rush in crowds to the edge of the safety line, and beyond! Police would come and crowd them back. Lines would be formed. Fire companies would arrive! Patrols! Everybody who knew of the event would run and stand and stare through the clouds of settling dust! Maybe there would be rumors of people who had been in the wrecked building, who might have gone down with it. Surely, though, everybody must have been warned out of the place! Yes, everybody who was known to be in danger must have been warned! But did anybody know of the three boys who had been down in the excavation when the cataclysm came?

How about the man who had warned Barry off the pavement—the man who had been stretching the rope? The last time Barry had seen him, he had stood with his back to the hole below, telling a man who asked about the settling wall. And both he and the inquirer had been intent on what was being told. Besides, they had stood beside the big tool-box on the curb, at an angle from the vault

in the excavation that made it unlikely either would then notice the boys down below. No, Barry could not recall any circumstances that made it seem probable that anyone had heeded their presence in the pit; people of the big city streets were not likely to pay much attention to the mere activities of boys!

In the silent darkness, Barry did not stir for a long minute, while these things ran through his mind. Then the dust in the air made him cough. Instantly a choking voice made itself heard!

"Hey! That you, Barry?"

"Yes," answered Barry hoarsely.

"What on earth's happened?" It was Gansy. He was whimpering.

"The wall of the building next door has fallen in on us!"

"Huh? Say! Huh?"

Gansy moved with scraping sounds on the cement floor. To Barry the sudden parallel to his experience in the dark passage the night before became vivid. What about the hoodoo that followed that treasure-box now!

But Gansy was half crying. "How'll we get out!" he exclaimed.

"I don't know," admitted Barry.

It was a strange sensation to be talking like that

through the absolute darkness and the absolute stillness, after the sudden hush that had fallen for them on the world.

"Where's Binch?" asked Gansy.

"He was in the door. He fell," answered Barry, remembering.

Gansy was quiet an instant; then suddenly he whimpered again.

"How'll we get out? Say! How'll we get out?"

Barry tried hard to control the terror that leaped in his heart. "Oh, they'll dig us out," he assured Gansy. But he felt no assurance himself. Certainly men outside would be in no haste to dig into that wreck if they did not suspect that someone was buried there.

"I want to get out!" sobbed Gansy suddenly. He was yielding quickly to fright. Abruptly he shouted. "Hey! Help! Help! Help! Oh, say! Help!"

It was almost a scream. But it was flat and dead in the close space of the vault. There were no echoes here like the echoes in the passage at No. 274!

But Barry was thinking of Mort Binch. He began to realize what it might mean that no sound had come from him. Was the other boy hurt? Was he dead? In his pocket Barry had a few matches now; he had carefully put them there after his ex-

periences of the previous night. He drew one out now and struck it.

The little light flared up, flickered, held. Through air as thick with dust as if a fog were falling, he could see at his feet a strange figure, white as a ghost, moving! But he knew it presently for Gansy Vleet, white with plaster dust! A glance down at his own clothes showed that he, Barry, was in the same state. Then he looked beyond Gansy to the doorway of the vault. And there lay a third whitened figure that could only be Binch! But the door itself was blocked with a mass of brick that had fallen part way in on to the threshold. And it seemed to have caught and pinioned Mort Binch there. Binch was motionless, plainly unconscious.

Was Mort Binch dead? And if so, was he worse off than Gansy Vleet and Barry Dare would presently be? Or better?

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BETTER WAY!

BARRY'S match burned down in his fingers and went out. Then he moved. "Gansy," he said, "we've got to help Mort. He's caught!" He took the Baylor model out of his coat and laid it on the floor at the back of the vault.

"I want to get out of here!" groaned Gansy, with thoughts only for himself.

"So do I!" said Barry. "But—Mort's caught!"

He groped his way toward the door of the place. He coughed again with the dust in his throat; but it was not so thick as it had been—it was settling. It made him wonder suddenly about the air-supply down here, however. Would it last? Evidently it was all right so far, for he could breathe—and the match had burned brightly.

He brushed his way past Gansy, who was climbing to his feet.

"Light another match!" gasped young Vleet.

"No," said Barry. "We may need 'em. Help me see if we can get Mort inside."

He found Mort's body by feeling. Everything he touched was powdery with plaster, and Mort's still face was no exception. Barry ran his hand fearfully down the left side of Mort's neck to see if he could feel a heart-beat in the jugular vein. Yes, Mort's heart was beating. He was alive!

Barry took hold of his shoulders and tried to drag him into the vault. He could not stir him. Obviously his legs were fast under that mass outside! Barry wondered if the legs were crushed!

But it seemed the only possible thing to do to try to free Mort. It was the only merciful thing! And then, if they themselves were to try to get out at all—if they were to make any attack on the avalanche of bricks that had buried them, they must begin by getting Mort free. His body was hopelessly in the way of any effort they might make, and besides, every brick they might remove from the mass above him would increase the threat upon his life. Any disturbance of the mass now at rest might bring it crushing down anew!

But Mort must be helped!

Gansy was sobbing and crying, repeating broken

sentences aloud and in whispers. Barry did not try to translate them.

"Gansy!" he said. "Shut up! It won't do any good to cry! Help me with Mort!"

"How can we do anything without a light?" whined Gansy.

Barry knew that he must have another look at the situation before any action was practical. His own heart was beating with heavy throbs; his whole body was shaking with excitement and apprehension. But he was holding Fear off at arm's length. He could see how worse than useless it would be to yield to it. Gansy Vleet's example helped him understand the folly of it!

He carefully lighted a second match. He looked first at the wall of tumbled brick above Mort Binch's prostrate body. In it he could see the edge of a stone window-sill that seemed to have fallen across the doorway, and wedged against the steel. And Barry's breath caught as he saw that the end of the stone was broken and crushed, and the steel itself bent a little out of shape, where they had come into contact! Mort Binch's legs were under that stone! What chance had flesh and blood in a grinding mass where stone was crushed against bending steel?

As his match burned down half way, Barry turned and looked around the narrow space inside the vault. Immediately his eyes caught sight of an old gas-jet on the side wall.

"Gee! Gas!" cried Gansy Vleet, sighting the jet at the same instant. "Light it!"

"There won't be any gas there," returned Barry. "That burner hasn't been lighted in years, I guess."

But he turned the key just the same, and applied his match to the burner. It was as he had expected; no gas had been through that pipe for years. Next moment he discovered why; just beside the door there was an electric bulb. As his match died, Barry turned the switch of this incandescent. No light resulted; either no current entered here now, or the bulb was dead.

His match out, he strained his eyes at the brick mass in the doorway. Did any light from the outside day sift down through the debris above? He could see no signs of it.

Barry dropped down on his knees beside Binch. If anything could be done for the unconscious boy, it must be Barry who did it. Gansy was sobbing again. Barry knew that he was taking chances even to explore with his hands the face of that mass of brick that filled the vault's doorway. Any mo-

ment he might touch the key brick that held the mass where it now was, and might trip the trigger that would bring it down upon himself as well as upon the helpless Binch. But something had to be done. And a solemn thought came across Barry's mind. If this was going to be the end of his life, here in this dread place, it would be a lot better to meet that end fighting for another fellow's life—even an enemy's life—than squealing like Gansy Vleet! No—he would not let a squeal out of his lips! Not a bleat!

He knelt beside Mort Binch, and ran his hands along Mort's body, as far down his legs as he could. When he came to the stone, he pushed his hand between it and Mort's thighs. It was apparently not crushing him! A sudden hope for Mort rose in him. And despite his own desperate circumstances, this heartened him!

He took hold of a fold of Mort Binch's trousers and pulled at them. One trouser-leg was fast. The other yielded to the tug. Barry recognized instantly that the looser leg was toward the side of the vault door that was bent by the crushed end of the stone sill. Did that mean that the stone, wedged here at an angle against the steel, was protecting, rather than crushing Mort? Barry bent over and got his

shoulders against the side of the doorway opposite to the higher end of the stone. Unable to see anything, even a foot before his eyes, all he did he was forced to do blindly and by feeling. But he managed to get the upper part of his own body down beside Mort's. Now, if the brick should settle and fall, he, Barry, would get whatever Mort would get! But Barry began gently, carefully, to push Mort one side, away from the lower toward the higher end of the wedged stone.

It was desperately hard work. The angle was such and the space so narrow that he had difficulty in bringing any force to bear. But after a time Mort's body slid a little way on the steel threshold! Barry felt again at the imprisoned legs. Had they changed position He was tempted to light a match again to see what he had achieved; but he knew he must not waste his supply.

"Hey, Barry! What you doin'?" pleaded Gansy Vleet. "Are we goin' to get out?"

"Maybe," said Barry, gritting his teeth. "If we keep our nerve!"

CHAPTER XXVII

FOR AN ENEMY'S SAKE

BARRY bent again, shoulders straining against the steel. Again he moved Mort Binch's body toward the far side of the vault's doorway. Then he reached down and pulled again at the trouser-legs. He could move them both! Both came up in loose rolls on Mort's legs above his knees!

Then the boy's legs must be free! Was it possiible? Barry threw himself back into the vault.

"Gansy!" he said. "Help me! I think we can get Mort inside now!"

He felt Gansy move against him. He guided the other boy's hands to Mort's shoulders in the darkness. But the moment Gansy touched Binch he seemed to wilt.

"I—I can't!" he sniveled. "I—I want to get out!"

A hot anger flamed in Barry Dare. "Don't be a coward!" he exclaimed. "Mort's worse off than we are! We'll help him first!"

But Gansy dragged himself away out of reach, and suddenly began to yell and shriek in an access of panic that was infectious. Barry felt his own horror of the situation rise like a tide in him at Gansy's mad screams! But he drove his doubled fists into his eyes, as if he could shut Fear out of his sight by such means!

"Entombed miners have been saved!" he whisperd. We'll be saved! Somebody must know we're here! We'll be saved!"

Then he bent to grasp Mort Binch by the shoulders again, and to pull desperately at his body. It seemed to yield a little. Barry bent all his strength to the task; the body of Binch seemed again to be moving—an inch!—a fraction of an inch!

But the other boy's feet were caught!

Barry did not know what to do. Could he reach those imprisoned feet? He could not, without digging out under there with his hands! And that would force him to thrust his arm as far out under that poised stone as his muscles would stretch! What a risk! What a deadly chance to take! And for what? For whom? For Mort Binch! For an enemy's sake!

He slipped out of his coat and laid the garment aside. He could be more free in his shirt. He

crawled in beside Mort on the side where the pinch was probably greatest. Slipping down on his back now, he thrust his right arm out beside Mort's trapped right leg, under the stone! Feeling, feeling, farther and farther, he found the bottom of the trousers, the garter, the top of the sock! His fingers touched the top of the shoe!

He was almost at the limit of his reach. Twisting himself lower on the steel sill he pushed his hand outward till his shoulder touched the stone. Suddenly a brick came crashing down upon the steel beside him! Another fell from the face of the pile and struck his free arm! Barry jerked half way out of the hole! Was the pile slipping? Was it coming down upon them now

But he did not draw entirely away. No more bricks fell; and there was still a chance to save Mort. He knew that he, Barry Dare, wouldn't want to live afterwards, if he quit while there was a chance to save Mort Binch! He thrust his arm again out under the stone!

He found what the trouble was. Mort's legs were not crushed under the great sill that had fallen across the vault's doorway. But the toes of his shoes stood up beyond the far edge of the stone too high for them to be dragged through the nar-

row space. What could be done? Mort could not be turned on his side, so as to turn his feet on their sides; there wasn't room to turn his thighs under the nearer edge of the stone. Then it was hopeless!

Barry drew his arm back out of the hole. His sleeve was torn and his flesh scraped, but he hardly noticed that. What could he do to get Mort Binch's feet loose? He tried to think. He knew he was terrified again. Feeling and feeling, out under that cruel mass, and having the sense that it was coming down upon him, had almost broken his nerve! He covered his eyes with his hands, and moaned. He couldn't help it!

And then what Errald Wyant had said came back again. "Fear is the only enemy! Be afraid of nothing but Fear—because it robs you of intelligence!"

Intelligence! It was intelligence that did things! —that overcame difficulties, made inventions, devised methods, conquered obstacles, cured disasters! Intelligence! What was intelligence? Just thought —that was all! And of course you couldn't think when you were scared! But how could you stop being scared? Why, think! Think! Of course!

Easy enough to make formulas. He sank down

against the wall. Gansy was crying, talking, sometimes shouting—almost gibbering! He was useless. Again the other's state of helpless terror nerved Barry. It wasn't in Barry Dare to be a blubbering baby, no matter what happened! And—if he could have a *little* more courage than Gansy Vleet, he could just as well have all the courage he needed! Courage was something he could just *take!* Fear was something he could just *discard!* There was only the difference between shrieking and sobbing—and trying to think what to do! That was all—and that was the difference between being cowardly and being brave! He could have all the courage he needed! How much did he need? Once more he covered his eyes. He would think!

He thought about Mort Binch's feet, and why they wouldn't come through under the stones. Why, it was because of his shoes, of course! With the shoes off, the feet would slip through any space the knees would go through, surely! Well, then! But could Barry get his hand away down in there to those feet again? And unlace those shoes? The effort he had already made, just to explore, had nearly exhausted him, and had almost frightened him out of the fight. And yet——"

The only way to do it was to do it! Barry be-

thought him of his knife. He could cut the laces on Binch's shoes and push the shoes loose. And then he could pull Binch's body out of that awful trap! And, nerved at last to try again, Barry Dare did just that. He pushed his hand, with his open knife, out under that stone again, to where Mort Binch's feet were caught, cut the laces of his shoes with patient, desperately painful effort, which cost him all his wind again and again, and took the skin off knuckles and elbow and shoulder! But he did it! And when the laces were loose, it was not so hard to push Binch's rather loose shoes off his feet!

And then—up on his knees once more, inside the vault, Barry caught Mort Binch under the arm-pits and dragged his body free!

"I got him!" he announced, not so much to Gansy as to the spirit of triumph that rose in him! Courage? It had won! It was worth while! It could be had—by determination! Grit and wit—that never quit! Barry Dare was learning a vital thing about life—and learning it fast!

CHAPTER XXVIII

A PICTURE IN THE DARK

Mort Binch was muttering incoherently. Gansy was silenced for the time. Barry, shaking with excitement, both at the risks he had taken and at his success, was too tired at the moment for further activity. He sank down once more beside the boy whom he had at last pulled out of immediate terrible danger; and he put out his hand upon the prostrate, quiet form, with a strange feeling rising in his heart. Mort Binch had been his enemy. Queer! Queer! Yesterday he would have thought that he hated Binch! Now he was hoping that the injured boy was not terribly hurt. He hoped so with all his heart!

But the problem that faced Barry Dare was black as the physical darkness about him! Suppose no one knew, up there in the street, where the sun was bright, that these live young humans were locked up here in the depths! How long would it be

before men would begin removing brick from the excavation? People would be asking, of course, if anyone had gone down with the falling building into the hole, as he had already thought; but what could make anyone think that someone had been already down there when the crash came? These thoughts came back periodically, repeating themselves over and over. *Would* anybody suspect that these boys were in the old vault? Of course not—they would have no notion of such a thing, unless chance eyes had spied them at the vault's door before the crash! And oh, what a remote chance that was! City people, accustomed to the movements of thousands about them constantly, are not likely to observe individuals to whom no special attention is attracted. But if no one knew of their terrible predicament—what then? How long could they last down here, these three captives, even if the air did not fail?

Was there not some way to let the world above know? How? Tons of brick and stone probably covered the vault. The fact that no ray of light penetrated from above was evidence that the mass which shut it off was thick!

I want to get out of here!" moaned Gansy.

Barry wanted to get out! It seemed as if he

could not endure another moment of the awful suspense. The impulse to spring up and tear at the bricks in the doorway was almost irresistible. But in his most terrified moment he had too much sense for that. Indeed, the only sounds which came to him were the occasional slipping and settling of the mass of wreckage outside. Presently several bricks fell on the steel threshold in the doorway again. Barry felt that he must see once more what the barrier there looked like.

He lighted another of his precious matches. For a moment he thought everything looked as before. Then he glanced down at the stone sill under which Mort Binch's body had lain. And horror caught at his throat as he saw that the stone had settled to within two inches of the steel! What would have happened to Mort Binch if he had still been in that trap was too awful to think of! Even Gansy Vleet stopped crying and stared; and then suddenly covered his eyes and shrank away shuddering!

Before the light died, Barry looked down at Binch. Blood was flowing slowly from a cut in his scalp. His head was hurt; how badly no one but a doctor could learn. He muttered again, once or twice, his dust-covered lips scarcely stirring. Barry took out his handkerchief and wiped away as much of

the plaster as he could from the other's mouth and nostrils; he lighted a splinter from the dying flame of his match, and used that to complete the task. He turned, looking for more splinters, and saw Gansy Vleet's ghostly powdered face; Gansy was staring at him in fascination.

"Say," Gansy said, with plain wonder, "you saved his life!"

It was true enough; but, as the light failed again, Barry's heart failed with it. Not one spark of hope burned in him. The more he recalled how the street had looked, in that last glance he had flung up at it before Mort's attack on him, the less he could see how anyone could know of the tragedy that threatened here! He had thought he had known before what fright was—last night, for instance, in the court behind No. 274!—or when circumstances and a savage dog had forced him to enter the Canderthorne house! But this! Nothing like this had ever touched his imagination!

How long he lay there, going over and over the situation in his mind, he could not guess. But he realized at last that this was not *thinking!* This was merely dwelling upon the terrible possibilities involved! Realization came to him suddenly that *thinking* meant looking on other sides of this affair

—if other sides there were! Abruptly he asked himself the question, What if we escape? That was another side of the affair, indeed!

It was hard to bring a picture of escape to his mind's eyes without any clue to how it might be achieved. A picture in the dark! But the effort began to suggest ideas of means. First he saw the surface of the huge brick-pile, as it probably looked now. Doubtless the dust had mostly settled. The big excavation might be half filled with the wreck that had fallen into it. Hundreds of people would be lining the street, looking out of windows, staring from the L platform! Hundreds, maybe thousands, of eyes would be watching for movements among the debris that would indicate the presence of victims there. They would catch the slightest sign of life in that excavation now! But what sign could reach their eyes from those too deeply buried to stir the surface?

Barry brushed some of the dust from his own face. In his hand he still held the stub of the splinter he had fired for light. A faint odor of smoke from it caught his attention. Smoke could go up through the tortuous openings of that porous mass overhead!

He could see how the onlookers would shout and

point if a shred of smoke should issue from the face of the avalanche! Perhaps he could make a little smoke by gathering all the splinters that might lie within reach in the wreck. He had lost his first fear of exhausting the air with fire. Of course he would not start much of a fire! A little one would be enough!

But what idea would smoke convey to people who saw it coming out of the wreckage? Fire, of course! They would think that the wreck had taken fire, as wrecks of buildings so often do, from broken stoves, or lamps, or crossed wires. And the first thing they would do would be to deluge the place with water! Firemen would attend to that! And the smoke would convey nothing to them!

But if smoke would go up to that surface, why wouldn't the sound of a shout rise to an attentive ear? Ah, yes—perhaps it would, if ears could first be made attentive! But how could Barry hope to catch that first attention, up there amidst the roar of the city's traffic, of trains, cars, cabs, gongs, whistles, bells, shouts of hucksters and newsmen, clatter of hoofs and chatter of talk! He was beginning to be conscious of the deep roar of sound that came through the ground, as it seemed, which was the city's collective voice. He had not thought of

it as sound, at first, when all detail had been shut off by the avalanche. And now he realized that detail sounds from above might penetrate down here more easily than detailed sounds from down here could reach up there!

Despair stabbed at him again!

CHAPTER XXIX

A KEY—TO WHAT?

It dazed him a little. But the picturing sense, once set at work, seemed to unwind scenes before his inner eyes quite automatically now.

He saw Reginald Canderthorne, as he might come back again to Mrs. Pitzer's after discovering the hoax that had been perpetrated on him with the box of sand. Of course he would pause to look at the wrecked building. And he wouldn't dream that the model he was so determined to get lay now at the bottom of this pile! Ha! If he should get that notion, he might dig Barry Dare out! Barry, a little numbed to active terror for the moment, saw Canderthorne as he might himself fall to clawing madly at the bricks. And he actually sensed the humor of that idea! Ashley Cheswick, too! Why, there might be a competition between the two men as to which could dig faster! Barry's mind took the freakish turn of seeing those two scratching

bricks away between their knees as a dog digs dirt out of a hole!

Then the thought of the model reminded him of Baylor. He could see the old inventor coming over from No. 274 itself, peering with his brown eyes, and mildly inquiring what had happened.

But, oh, what good was all this?

And yet he went on seeing. He could see old Angus Baylor standing at the edge of the excavation—or as near as the police would allow—and staring down without the slightest idea that his precious invention was both saved and lost down there! He would stand and look, just like the hundreds of others. And oh, nobody would do anything!—because they would not think that anything was up to them to do! They would—just look!

If only there was some way to push a pole up through the wreck! And if he only had the pole! If only there were some wire, that could be pulled, or broken, that would attract attention by movement, or by interrupted current. But the only wires down here were the lamp-wires—embedded in concrete and already dead! If only—if only—what?

He put his head back against the wall, as wave after wave of fear rushed over him. The perspira-

tion stirred by his violent efforts in Mort Binch's behalf had dried itself in the dirt on his face, but his shirt was wet with it. His skin shivered under it. Then the chill spread and became an aching ague! For a time he lost all control of quivering nerves.

But back came that phrase of Errald Wyant's about Fear, the arch-enemy! And Barry could understand now how Fear might kill. Easily it might kill—if you didn't fight it, like any other enemy!

And at that he roused all the young manhood in him. "I won't die of fear!" he sobbed. And then he began saying it—just that phrase, over and over, aloud—till his voice stopped its trembling that made him ashamed. He forgot that Gansy Vleet might be listening—that he could not fail to hear! And then—all at once, he prayed—and forgot to be ashamed of that, as people do forget, when they look into the face of Death!

And then he thought, "Now, I can think again! I'll keep on thinking! I'll just think!"

And suddenly he was thinking—about the gas-pipe in the wall of the vault, above his head! Gansy had thought that gas might still be in it. That would imply unbroken connections—and the supply

turned on. Barry had demonstrated with his match-flame that no supply of gas was in the pipe. But the connections might still be intact! Indeed, why should they be broken?

His thoughts began to grow more ordered. When gas was used in this building, perhaps many years ago, it must have been piped in from the street. The pipe must have come in through the basement. When the gas was shut off, there would have been no reason for pulling out the old pipes. People didn't usually pull out such useless apparatus from old buildings—until they were wrecked! Might a building be torn down without pulling out the old gas pipes in the basement? It was possible, provided that the pipes lay under or along the basement floor, and not overhead, under the beams of the first story.

A picture of how details of the excavation had looked when he first began to notice it rose before Barry's eyes. He was sure he had seen pipes—gas or water pipes—maybe both!—runnning up out of the ground beside the foundation wall that still stood at the front, like a retaining wall to hold the earth in under the street pavement! Why, great ghosts! if the gas-pipe ran out there—underground

or on the floor, from the old vault out to that front foundation wall, and so up to its old connection in the street—why then it ran from where Barry Dare sat at this moment, in the buried vault, almost to the very feet of the watching crowd outside!

But what of it? It was no telephone! You couldn't blow smoke through it! You couldn't push or pull or move it in any other way to attract attention! Oh, what good was it?

Barry's muscles were tense. Sweat was pouring again down his stiff face. Suddenly he leaped up and scrambled to his feet. No! You could not 'phone through, or push or pull or wigwag, that old pipe! But *you could beat on it with a stone!* And if the pipe did come up out of that wreck in the excavation, the sounds of that beating would come up too!

If! What were the chances?

Sounds! What kind of sounds?

Gansy Vleet was up beside him, groping at him with his hands and asking questions. But Barry hardly heard him. He struck another match; he still had half a dozen or more left. Visualizing the course that pipe must take, if he could hope that it still reached out to its old connections, Barry knew

that here in the vault, it must run down, and not up! In trepidation almost afraid to look, he turned the light of his match, with cupped hand as reflector, upon the wall!

The pipe that had once supplied the old jet came out directly from the cement wall of the old vault! Like the electric wires, it was embedded in the concrete! Of course! Barry could not learn whether it went up or down!

But it went somewhere!—unless it were broken off at the side or top of the vault! Anyway there was a chance that it went somewhere! And a chance to Barry Dare at that moment spelled the difference between strength to act and complete collapse! He caught up a half brick from the doorway. Then he saw that he could not produce any worthwhile sounds with this—nor by striking against the old brass fixture. He must get at the pipe itself—with a stone or a piece of metal.

His match died. But in the darkness he reached up and took the old gas-jet in both hands. A wrench, and it broke off! His fingers told him now that the end of the pipe was exposed. He had to strike another light then to find something to pound with. But he found it! An old key hung on the wall

beside the jet—a heavy old bronze key, nearly eight inches long, that had one day doubtless controlled the lock of some inner strong-box kept down here, and long ago discarded. Forgotten, here the old key had hung—how many years! Might it now prove the key to freedom?

CHAPTER XXX

SOMETHING BEGUN!

BARRY struck at the bared end of the old gas-pipe with the bronze key!

The result was a sharp metallic crack that sounded loud in the confined space of the vault. But, better than that, the pipe gave off a sound that seemed to run out and away through stretching lengths which had a ring all their hollow own! No short pipe; when struck, sounds like a long one! This was a long pipe!

Barry's hope flamed. That pipe carried the sounds he made away somewhere! If they reached any ears, then it was up to him to make them sounds that would convey some meaning. What sort of sounds could he make that would attract attention to themselves?

He struck three sharp raps on the pipe. Was it a message to an outside world? He struck again. Then three more. It was hard to hit the end of the

pipe in the dark. But he devised the plan of letting the key swing along the wall from above till it hit the pipe. Then he began to think of what sort of rythmical rappings might catch casual ears. He began to try a variety. First a long series, quick, sharp—as one raps on a window-pane to attract attention outside. Then, as if he knew he had a listener, he struck two, then three, then two, blows in sequence.

For a minute or two hope rose so high that the thing seemed easy and simple beyond belief. Then he missed the pipe completely in the dark. A moment afterwards he skinned his knuckles on the rough concrete. Presently he became abruptly convinced that this rapping was mere trivial, monotonuos sound that would never rouse curiosity, even if it reached any ears at all! And then he became sure that all the sound he might make by this means was merely sliding away into the earth somewhere, dissipated and dead, like a grounded electric current. And once more Despair became an entity to him that bared its teeth in the dark and laughed!

But Barry Dare had begun to do something. He had an instinct to keep on doing a thing he had undertaken to do! Better still, he had a habit of keeping on—a habit of not quitting! The old key

began to take a steadier, more patient swing. Rap, rap! Rap, rap, rap! Rap, rap! Rap, rap, rap! Then a long swift succession again, staccato and sharp! And then, once, he mixed his methods, and happened to strike two raps first, and then several, and then two twos! And abruptly he thought he had rapped out the number 274!

That startled new trains of thought awake. Why not 274? If old Angus Baylor *should* chance to hear that, it would mean something to him! He had a quick mind. Then, there was the street number at Mrs. Pitzer's, next door. It was 513. Why not 513? He began to beat them out—274, 513! And then, there was the number of the hose-company down the block—44! Why not that? Firemen, accustomed to listen for the tapping of signal gongs, might catch some significance from that! 44! 274! 513! 44! 274! 513!

Over and over and over Barry Dare beat them out, standing there in that dark chamber under the fallen avalanche of brick that had buried him and his two enemies alive—and pinning all his hopes to see the light of day again on the slender chance that such a broadcasting might somewhere find receiving sets *tuned in*!

44! 274! 513! On and on he went. Once he

paused to explain to the now importunate Gansy. Once he paused to wrap his handkerchief around his bleeding knuckles. But on he went, rapping, rapping, rapping! How he wished that he knew something about the Morse telegraph code and could send real messages in words out to the outer air! But he knew nothing of Morse. Besides, the chances that others outside would recognize the code were slight. And moreover—he did not know that his rapping was getting outside!

44! 274! 513! 44! 274! 513! 44! 274! 513!

Then he remembered the phone number at the New Century Club. Barry had a good memory for numbers. Of course he could make no sounds that would suggest the name of a telephone exchange; but he could rap out 2435! He tried that a while—and then wondered why he had thought of such a thing. Of course it was because he had pictured his friend Errald Wyant as out there in the crowd! How silly! Mr. Wyant was at the club—he was to be there all morning. What time would it be now?

Why—what time *would* it be? How long since the avalanche had shut him and his companions away here in this dungeon? How long had he been think-

ing, working, fighting terror, signaling? Was it hours? Or was it only minutes? Probably it had been a much shorter time than he was inclined to think. And yet—it might have been long enough so that people outside had already begun to lose interest in an accident that was over! He could see the crowd beginning to break up! They would drift away. Nobody would stay very long—except maybe a fireman, detailed to watch awhile for a blaze—or a policeman—or the workman who had stretched the tardy rope, and who might be instructed to stay about the place. The fireman would be the only one who might recognize the steady tapping of a number which had meaning for him!

44! 44! 44! 44! Barry rapped the hose-company's number once, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again! Then his heart sank, suddenly. How could he know which number might reach the right ears at the right moment? Oh, how could he know that any of his numbers reached any ears!

But he wouldn't quit!

After a time he built a little platform of bricks from the doorway, to stand on, so that he would not have to reach so high to the pipe. Gansy helped

him by holding a light with splinters. When the platform was done, Barry got his mouth up to the level of the old pipe. It had occurred to him that he might learn something from it by blowing through it. He could at least tell by that means whether the far end was free or still connected to a gas main and closed off tight by a valve. His first breath blew free, away into emptiness! Did that mean that the far end of the pipe stood up near the front foundation wall of the excavation, near where the spectators must be standing now? If so—could he—was it possible—that he might use it as a speaking-tube?

He had seen such things. 'Phones, public and private, were so numerous now-a-days that the old-fashioned speaking-tubes were rare. But there was still one in the old walls of Mrs. Pitzer's rooming-house. And why should not a voice carry through an old gas-pipe, as well as through an old speaking-tube? It would!

He adopted a new system then. First he would rap out 274; then he would shout the name of Angus Baylor—shout it in the dark, at the end of the old pipe, located by feeling! Then he would rap out 513, and shout "Mrs. Pitzer! This is Barry

Dare!" Then number 44! and, "Firemen—we're buried in the old vault, under the brick!"

And yet—for all Barry Dare could know, his voice was lost in thin air, or city's roar, or somewhere short of both!

But he wouldn't quit!

CHAPTER XXXI

SOMETHING TO FINISH!

SLOWLY, slowly, the time crept by. Once when he had a light, Barry looked at his watch—the watch his mother had given him! His eyes blurred as he thought of her, and what her mad terror would be if she could know what was happening to him! Then, when he brushed the tears out of his eyes, he found that the watch had stopped; in the headlong course of his wild night's experiences, he had forgotten to wind it! Had he been in this fatal cell an hour? Was it noon yet? Was it getting to be night?

Rap, rap, rap, rap! "Fire! Help! We're buried under the brick!" It became a machine-like repetition. Rapping, shouting; rapping, shouting! His hand was raw where the concrete had scraped off the skin through the worn out handkerchief; his voice grew hoarse. His strength was failing; his head and neck ached; he was losing heart! What

was the use? Oh, what *was* the use." Nobody would hear! Nobody would dig into the bricks for days —maybe not for weeks! Nobody would miss him, Barry, or the others—at least, nobody would miss them enough to look for them—for hours—maybe for a whole night! And when search began, nobody would have a clue to the truth—nobody would dream that they were in the old vault, now hidden from everybody's eyes!

But Barry's bleeding hand went on rapping; his husky shout continued. He did not stop!

Rap, rap! Rap, rap, rap, rap, rap, rap, rap! Rap, rap, rap, rap! "Augus Baylor! I'm buried—with your model—under the brick!"

There came a time when Barry thought he could not rap and shout any longer. His arm was numb and tingling, his throat was raw. But, each time, he tried just once more!

Just once more, now this is the last!

No—just once more! *This* is the last!

No—just once more!

And just once more!

And—just—once—more!

He was growing giddy. Once he lost track of just what he was doing. He was not sure just

which number he had rapped, and of how he had called! And then all at once he caught himself shouting into the tube the phrase he supposed he was whispering to himself!

"Just once more!" he shouted. "Just once more!"

And when he understood that he was getting confused, he knew that he was near defeat. Defeat! He, Barry Dare, who wouldn't quit!

"Just once more!" he cried out at the old pipe, in the dark! Two raps—seven—four! His hand dropped! His head sagged against the wall! He felt his knees giving way!

"No! Help! Once more! Two, seven, four! It's Barry Dare! Buried under the brick! Oh, help! Help us!"

And then, suddenly, out of the pipe, came a strange, far away sound! For a moment the dazed boy could not understand. Rap, rap, rap! Sounds he, Barry Dare, was not making! But sounds in the pipe! And then—oh, how could it be?—"Hello! Who's there? Where are you?" A man's big voice that seemed like—like a voice out of the sky!

Barry clawed at the solid concrete, to keep from falling.

"Just once more!" he shouted, helpless to change

his phrase. "Barry Dare! I'm in the old vault—under the brick!"

And then he knew he was falling. And all consciousness of fear, and of hope, and of courage, and of determination went out for Barry Dare like a light that is snapped off!

* * *

When he came back to consciousness, daylight was all about him. A great opening yawned in the bricks and men were at the old vault's door. Gansy Vleet was screaming with joy as they pulled him out. A man was lifting the body of Mort Binch —who was alive!—moving and talking! And then somebody came and bent over Barry Dare!

He was a big man, with a jolly face. Barry knew him—he was Errald Wyant!

"Well, son," he said, in his big, friendly way, "Here we are at last!"

And he picked Barry Dare up in his arms—for Barry couldn't get up alone!

But Barry's ideas were coming back. "Oh, get the model!" he whispered. "It's there on the floor, in the bag!"

He pointed to the back of the vault—and Errald Wyant stooped and picked up the model—and—

took it with them. Barry didn't know just where they were going—or how. But he knew it was all right now. It was all right!

* * *

When Barry could talk, he told the whole tale to Errald Wyant; but he found that Mr. Wyant had heard much of it before. And he had to listen while Mr. Wyant talked to him. Who had heard the rapping on the pipe? Why, several people. The pipe did come up by the front foundation wall, and almost to a level with the pavement there. And a woman, first, and then two or three men, had noticed the tapping—coming like a voice out of the air! Tapping, tapping, tapping—coming and going, on and on, under and through all noises and lulls and changes of sounds of the city's clamor! Patient, steady, unremitting! But it had been the "traffic-cop" from the corner of the avenue under the L, who had at last caught the meaning of the "voice of the pipe," as Errald Wyant called it. Queer! That "cop" was number 274! He heard his number called, in raps on the old gas-pipe. And when he bent down over the pavement's edge to listen, he heard,

"Just once more! Two, seven, four! It's Barry Dare—under the brick!"

Well—the rest was simple then. Hundreds of hands helped. Out came the bricks, and down went men! And then Errald Wyant himself drove up in his big roadster, because, as he said, he kept thinking about Barry Dare, who had said he was in trouble, and who did not come to the New Century Club, as he had said he would. And Errald Wyant heard Policeman 274 tell what he had heard. And—well, they dug Barry out!

Angus Baylor appeared on the scene—and strangely enough, his son, the young man with the red eyebrows, who could not keep his father's model after he had tried to carry it away! And young Vernon Baylor explained why he had given Barry an errand to do and had run away. Young Baylor had seen old enemies looking for him!

The old enemies were members of Ashley Cheswick's gang. Cheswick had once worked for Angus Baylor, but had tried to steal his ideas. Vernon, Baylor's son, resenting Cheswick's attempt, had waylaid him one night, and knowing he was not "the panther's" equal physically, had struck him down with a cane. Cheswick had nearly died of the blow; hence the charge of attempt to kill that had kept Vernon from coming home. Now, however,

Vernon Baylor had decided to face the charge if Cheswick dared to press it!

Canderthorne was a capitalist who had dealt with Cheswick. He claimed he had "bought" the Baylor lock from Cheswick; hence his daring attempts to get possession of it. How he had gotten a clue to the fact that Vernon had put the model into Barry Dare's hands must remain a mystery; but Vernon guesed shrewdly at the treachery of a friend of his who knew his intention to return it to his father, and who might easily have sold that information to Canderthorne, who could then have watched the outcome.

But both Cheswick and Canderthorne had disappeared; and Errald Wyant thought likely they might not hurry to come about, now that Angus Baylor had friends. He proposed, he said, to be one of the friends.

Vernon Baylor suspected that Cheswick had gotten his information about the return of the model from an intercepted letter which Vernon had written to his father and which Angus Baylor said he had never received. Cheswick had then tricked old Angus out of the house and had waited, probably, to waylay Vernon there. Barry's coming instead of Vernon had doubtless made Cheswick fear the hand of other

people in the affair; and he wanted no witnesses to his doings. Gansy Vleet told them that Cheswick had met Mort Binch in the street when Mort was spying on Barry to learn where he lived, and after Mort had seen Barry go in and out of Number 274. Cheswick told Mort he wouuld pay him to get the package Barry had failed to deliver.

Angus Baylor said that Barry Dare had saved a fortune for him, and that he must have a big reward. And he handed over the whole affair to Errald Wyant, who, it seemed was a man who had plenty of money to get patents and manufacture things, and who said that the Baylor time-lock was a good thing and might easily have more than "a hundred thousand dollars in it!"

And when all was explained, here was Gansy Vleet, listening wide-eyed! Mort, it seemed, had been sent to the hospital; but the report was that he would get over his hurts. Gansy, however—queer, mean little Gansy, couldn't go away. He stuck by.

"And say!" he said suddenly to Errald Wyant at the end of the story. "He saved Mort Binch's life—Barry did!"

He described how it had been done. Mr. Wyant

listened. But when Gansy concluded, Mr. Wyant said:

"He saved your life, too, youngster—don't you realize that? Just because he had courage enough to use his brains!"

"But I don't see," said Barry, "why we had all the trouble about the model. Is it—unlucky, or something?"

"Trouble?" repeated Errald Wyant, grinning at him. "For the same reason all trouble happens—because of people's selfish greed!"

"What? But *I* had trouble, too!"

"Well?" Wyant studied him. "Didn't you have a notion that you—might get a finger into the pie? Why didn't you go to the police with the model—or tell me about it?"

Barry flushed. Then he nodded. "That's the reason," he admitted.

"You're human, like the rest of us—even if you are a hero, Barry Dare!" said Errald Wyant, and laughed. Then he sobered. "But that's what makes heroes interesting to the rest of us—because they're heroes in spite of being human!"

He took out a check-book and pen and wrote a check.

"Here's a little advance on the salvage we'll pay

you," he explained. "You get on a train and take it home to your mother and your dad. And when you come back, you'll work for me. I like young chaps who—put all they've got into whatever they do!"

Barry as abashed. "I *couldn't* quit!" he protested.

"Just think where you'd have been now, if you had!"

Barry shuddered. Then he looked up suddenly. "What time is it?"

"Three o'clock!"

"And—and it's all happened since last night at seven!"

Errald Wyant smiled. "Things happen fast to people who won't quit," he said. "And that's the real reason why you've had such a tremendous twenty hours."

Barry looked out of the window. Tremendous? Big word! But not too big for the idea that had become a possession of Barry Dare!

THE END